CYNTHIA

A DAUGHTER OF THE PHILISTINES

CHAPTER I.

Two friends were sitting together outside the Café des Tribunaux in Dieppe. One of them was falling in love; the other, an untidy and morose little man, was wasting advice. It was the hour of coffee and liqueurs, on an August evening.

'You are,' said the adviser irritably, 'at the very beginning of a career. You have been surprisingly fortunate; there is scarcely a novelist in England who wouldn't be satisfied with such reviews as yours, and it's your first book. Think: twelve months ago you were a clerk in the city, and managed to place about three

short stories a year at a guinea each. Then your aunt what-was-her-name left you the thousand pounds, and you chucked your berth and sat down to a novel. "Nothing happens but the unforeseen"—the result justified you. You sold your novel; you got a hundred quid for it; and the *Saturday*, and the *Spectator*, and every paper whose opinion is worth a rush, hails you as a coming light. For you to consider marrying now would be flying in the face of a special providence.'

'Why?' said Humphrey Kent.

'"Why!" Are you serious? Because your income is an unknown quantity. Because you've had a literary success, not a popular one. Because, if you keep single, you've a comfortable life in front of you. Because you'd be a damned fool.'

'The climax is comprehensive, if it isn't convincing. But the discussion is a trifle "previous," eh? I can't marry you, my pretty maid, et cetera.'

'You are with her all day,' said Turquand—'I conclude she likes you. And the mother countenances it.'

'There is really nothing to countenance; and, remember, they haven't any idea of my position: they meet

me in a fashionable hotel, they had read the book, and they saw the *Times* review. What do they know of literary earnings?—the father is on the Stock Exchange, I believe! I am an impostor.'

'You should have gone to the little show I recommended on the quay, then. *I* find it good enough.'

Kent laughed and stretched himself.

'I am rewarding industry,' he said. 'For once I wallow. I came into the money, and I put it in a bank, and by my pen, which is mightier than the sword, I've replaced all I drew to live during the year. Am I not entitled to a brief month's splash? Besides, I've never said I want to marry—I don't know what you're hacking at.'

'You haven't "said" it, but the danger is about as plain as pica to the average intelligence, all the same. My son, how old are you—twenty-seven, isn't it? Pack your bag, ask for your bill, and go back with me by the morning boat; and, if you are resolved to make an ass of yourself over a woman, go and live in gilded infamy, and buy sealskin jackets and jewellery while your legacy lasts. I'll forgive you that.'

'The prescription wouldn't be called orthodox?'

'You'd find it cheaper than matrimony in the long-run, I promise you. When now and again some man plays ducks and drakes with a fortune for a cocotte there are shrieks enough to wake his ancestors; but marriage ruins a precious sight more men every year than the demi-monde and the turf and the tables put together, and nobody shrieks at all—except the irrepressible children. Did it never occur to you that the price paid for the virtuous woman is quite the most appalling one known in an expensive world?'

'No,' said Kent shortly, 'it never did.'

'And they call you "an acute observer"! Marriage is Man's greatest extravagance.'

'The apothegm excepted. It sounds like a dissipated copybook.'

'It's a fact, upon my soul. I tell you, a sensible girl would shudder at the thought of entrusting her future to a man improvident enough to propose to her; a fellow capable of marrying a woman is the sport of a reckless and undisciplined nature she should beware of.'

'The end is curaçoa-and-brandy,' said Kent, 'and in

your best vein. What else? You'll contradict yourself with brilliance in a moment if you go on.'

The journalist dissembled a grin, and Kent, gazing down the sunny little street, inhaled his cigarette pleasurably. To suppose that Miss Walford would ever be his wife looked to him so chimerical that his companion's warnings did not disturb him, yet he was sufficiently attracted by her to find it exciting that a third person could think it likely. He was the son of a man who had once been very wealthy, and who, having attempted to repair injudicious investments by rasher speculation, had died owning little more than enough to defray the cost of his funeral. At the age of nineteen Humphrey realized that, with no stock-in-trade beyond an education and a bundle of rejected manuscripts, it was incumbent on him to fight the world unassisted, and, suppressing his literary ambitions as likely to tell against him, betook himself to some connections who throve in commerce and had been socially agreeable. 'To be annihilated by a sense of your own deficiencies, seek an appointment at the hands of relations.' The boy registered the aphorism, and withdrew. When

'life' means merely a struggle to sustain existence, it is not calculated to foster optimism, and the optimistic point of view is desirable for the production of popular English fiction. His prospect of achieving many editions would have been greater if his father had been satisfied with five per cent. He shifted as best he could, and garnered various experiences which he would have been sorry to think would be cited by his biographer, if he ever had one. 'Poverty is no disgrace,' but there are few disgraces that cause such keen humiliations. Eventually he found regular employment in the office of a stranger, and, making Turquand's acquaintance in the lodging-house in which he obtained a bedroom, contemplated him with respect and envy. Turquand was subediting *The Outpost*, a hybrid 'weekly' for which he wrote a little of what he thought and much that he disapproved, in consideration of a modest salary. The difference in their years was not too great to preclude confidences. An intimacy grew between the pair over their evening pipes in the arid enclosure to which the landlady's key gave them access, and was transplanted to joint quarters embellished with their

several possessions, chiefly portmanteaus and photographs, equally battered. The elder man, perceiving there was distinction in the unsuccessful stories displayed to him, imparted a good deal of desultory advice, of which the most effectual part was not the assurance that the literary temperament was an affliction, and authorship a synonym for despair. The younger listened, sighed, and burned. Aching to be famous, and fettered to a clerk's stool, he tugged at his chains. He had begun to doubt his force to burst them, when he was apprised, to his unspeakable amazement, that a maternal aunt, whom he had not seen since he was a schoolboy, had bequeathed him a thousand pounds.

Dieppe had dined, and the Grande Rue was astir. He watched the passers-by with interest. In the elation of his success he was equal to tackling another novel on the morrow, and he saw material in everything: in the chattering party of American girls running down from the Plage to eat more ices at the pastrycook's; in the coquettish dealer in rosaries and Lives of the Saints, who had put up her shutters for the night, and was bound for the Opera; in the little

boy-soldiers from the barracks, swaggering everywhere in uniforms several sizes too big for them. Sentences from the reviews he was still receiving bubbled through his consciousness deliciously, and he wished, swelling with gratitude, that the men who wrote them were beside him, that he might be introduced, and grip their hands, and try to express the inexpressible in words.

'I should like to live here, Turk,' he remarked: 'the atmosphere is right. It's suggestive, stimulating. When I see a peasant leaning out of a window in France, I want to write verses about her; when I see the same thing at home, I only notice she is dirty.'

'Ah!' said Turquand, 'that's another reason why you had better go back with me to-morrow. The tendency to write verses leads to the casual ward. Let us go and watch the Insolent Opulence losing its francs.'

The Casino was beginning to refill, and the path and lawn were gay with the flutter of toilettes as they reached the gates. Two of the figures approaching the rooms were familiar to the novelist, and he discovered

their presence with a distinct shock, though his gaze had been scanning the crowd in search of them.

'There are the Walfords,' he said.

The other grunted—he also had recognised a girl in mauve—and Kent watched her silently so long as she remained in view. He knew he had nerves when he saw Miss Walford. The sight of her aroused a feeling of restlessness in him latterly which demanded her society for its relief, and he had not denied to himself that when a stranger, sitting behind him yesterday in the salon de lecture, had withdrawn a handkerchief redolent of the *corylopsis* which Miss Walford affected, it had provided him with a sensation profoundly absurd.

If he had nerves, however, there was no occasion to parade the fact, and he repressed impatience laudably. It was half an hour before the ladies were encountered. Objecting to be foolish, he felt, nevertheless, that Cynthia Walford was an excuse for folly as she turned to him on the terrace with her faint smile of greeting; felt, with unreasoning gratification, that Turquand must acknowledge it.

She was a fair, slight girl, with dreamy blue eyes bewitchingly lashed, and lips so delicately modelled that the faint smile always appeared a great tribute upon them. She was no less beautiful for her manifest knowledge she was a beauty, and though she could not have been more than twenty-two, had the air of carrying her loveliness as indifferently as her frocks—which tempted a literary man to destruction. She accepted admiration like an entremet at a table d'hôte—something included in the menu, and arriving as a matter of course; but her acceptance was so graceful that it was delightful to bend to her and offer it.

Kent asked if they were going in to the concert, and Mrs. Walford said they were not. It was far too warm to sit indoors to listen to that kind of music! She found Dieppe insufferably hot, and ridiculously overrated. Now, Trouville was really lively; did he not think so?

He said he did not know Trouville.

'Don't you? Oh, it is ever so much better; very jolly—really most jolly! We were there last year, and enjoyed it immensely. We—we had such a time!'

She giggled loudly. 'How long are you gentlemen remaining?'

'Mr. Turquand is "deserting" to-morrow,' he said. 'I? Oh, I shall have to leave in about a week, I am afraid.'

'You said that a week ago,' murmured Miss Walford.

'I like the place,' he confessed; 'I find it very pleasant myself.'

Mrs. Walford threw up her hands with a scream of expostulation. Her face was elderly, despite her attentions to it; but in her manner she was often a great deal more youthful than her daughter; indeed, while the girl had already acquired something of the serenity of a woman, the woman was superficially reverting to the artlessness of a girl.

'What is there to like? Dieppe is the Casino, and the Casino is Dieppe!'

'But the Casino is very agreeable,' he said, his glance wandering from her.

'And the charges are perfectly monstrous, though, of course, you extravagant young men don't mind that.'

'A friend might call me young,' said Turquand

gloomily; 'my worst enemy couldn't call me extravagant.'

'*I* plead innocent too,' returned Kent. 'I'm as little complacent under extortion as anybody.'

She was pleased to hear him say so. All she asked of a young man was that he should be well provided for, but for him to have the good feeling to exercise a nice economy until he became engaged was an additional recommendation. Her giggle was as violent as before, though.

'Oh, I dare say,' she exclaimed facetiously; 'I'm always being taken in; I don't believe those stories any longer. Do you remember Willy Holmes, Cynthia, and the tales he used to tell me? I used to think that young man was so steady, I was always quoting him. And it turned out he was a regular scapegrace; and everybody knew it all the time, and had been laughing at me. I've given up believing in anyone, Mr. Kent—in anyone, do you hear?' She shook the splendours of her bonnet at him, and gasped and gurgled archly. 'I've no doubt you're every bit as bad as the rest!'

He answered with the sort of inanity required. Miss

Walford asked him a question, and he took a seat beside her in replying. Turquand also found a chair. Twilight was falling, and a refreshing breeze began to make itself felt. "A fashionable sea purled on the sand below with elegant decorum." In the building the concert commenced, and snatches of orchestration reached them through the chatter of American and English and French from the occupants of the tables behind. Presently Mrs. Walford wanted to go and play Petits Chevaux. The sub-editor, involuntarily attached to the party, accompanied her, and Kent and the girl followed. The crowds round the miniature courses were large, but Turquand prevailed on the dame to perceive that there was still space for them all to stand together. She complimented him on his dexterity, but immediately afterwards became fatigued, and begged him to pilot her to a corner where she could sit down. The party was now necessarily divided into couples.

CHAPTER II.

He had appreciated the manœuvres sufficiently to feel no surprise when the room was pronounced stifling ten minutes later, and she declared she must return to the terrace. She had hitherto, however, evinced such small desire for his companionship that he was momentarily undecided which tête-à-tête was the one she had been anxious to effect.

'Pouf!' she exclaimed, as they emerged into the air. 'It was unbearable. Where are the others? Didn't they come out too?'

'They have no idea we've gone,' said Turquand dryly.

She was greatly astonished, and had to turn before she could credit it.

'I thought they were behind us,' she repeated several

times. 'I'm *sure* they saw us move. Oh, well, they'll find it out in a minute, I expect. Never mind.'

They strolled up and down among the promenaders.

'Sorry you're going, Mr. Turquand?' inquired the lady. 'Your friend will miss you very much.'

'I don't think so,' he answered. 'He knew I was only running over for a few days.'

'He tells me it is the first holiday he has taken for years,' she said. 'His profession seems to engross him. I suppose it *is* an engrossing one. But he oughtn't to exhaust his strength. I needn't ask you if you've read his novel. What do you think of it?'

'I think it extremely clever work,' replied Turquand.

'And it's been a great success, too, eh? "One of the books of the year," the *Times* called it.'

'It has certainly given him a literary position.'

'How splendid!' she said. 'Yes, that's what *I* thought it: "extremely clever," brilliant—most brilliant! His parents must be very proud of him?'

'They are dead,' said Turquand.

Mrs. Walford was surprised again. She had somehow taken it for granted they were living, and as she

understood he had no brothers or sisters, it must be very lonely for him.

'He sees a good deal of *me*,' said her escort, 'and I'm quite a festive sort of person when you know me.'

Her giggle announced that she found this entertaining, but the approval did not loosen his tongue. She fanned herself strenuously, and decided that, besides being untidy, he was dense.

'Of course, in one way,' she pursued, 'his condition is an advantage to him. Literary people have to work so hard if they depend on their writing, don't they?'

'*I* do,' he assented, 'I'm sorry to say.'

His constant obtrusion of himself into the matter annoyed her singularly. She had neither inquired nor cared if he worked hard, and felt disposed to say so. Turquand, who realized now why honours had been thrust upon him this evening, regretted that loyalty to Kent prevented his doing him what he felt would be the greatest service that could be rendered, and removing the temptation of the mauve girl permanently from his path.

'With talent and private means our author is fortunate?'

'I often tell him so,' he said.

'If it doesn't tempt him to rest on his oars,' she added delightedly. 'Wealth *has* its dangers. Young men *will* be young men.'

'"Wealth" is a big word,' said he. 'Kent is certainly not to be called "wealthy."'

'But he does not rely on his pen?' she cried with painful carelessness.

'He has some private means, I believe; in fact, I know it.'

'I am so glad — so glad for him. Now I have no misgivings about his future at all. . . . Have *you*?'

'I'm not sure that I follow you.'

She played with her fan airily.

'He is certain to succeed, I mean; he need not fear anything, since he has a competence. Oh, I know what these professions are,' she went on, laughing. 'My son is in the artistic world; we are quite behind the scenes. I know how hard-up some of the biggest

professionals are when they have nothing but their vocation to depend on. A profession is so precarious—shocking—even when one has aptitude for it.'

'Kent has more than "aptitude,"' he said. 'He has power. Perhaps he'll always work too much for himself and the reviewers to attract the very widest public. Perhaps he is a trifle inclined to over-do the analytical element in his stuff; but that's the worst that can be said of it. And, then, it's a question of taste. For myself, I'm a believer in the introspective school, and I think his method's admirable.'

'Schools' and 'methods' were meaningless to the lady in such a connection. Novels were novels, and they were either 'good' or they were 'rubbish,' if she understood anything about them; and she had read them all her life. She looked perplexed, and reiterated the phrase she had used already.

'Oh, extremely clever, brilliant—most brilliant, really! I quite agree with you.'

'Your son writes, did you say, Mrs. Walford?'

'Oh no, not writes—no! He sings! He is—er—studying for the operatic stage.' Her tone could not

have been more impressive if she had said he was De Reszke. 'His voice is quite magnificent.'

'Really!' he replied with interest. 'That is a great gift—a voice.'

'He is "coming out" soon,' she said. 'He—er—he could get an engagement at any moment, but—he is so conscientious. He feels he must do himself entire justice when he makes his début. In professional circles he is thought an immense amount of—immense!'

'Has he sung at any concerts?'

'In private,' she explained—'socially. He visits among musicians a great deal. And of course it makes it very lively for *us*. He is quite—er—in the swim!'

'You are to be congratulated on your family,' said Turquand. 'With such a son, and a daughter like Miss Walford——'

'Yes, she is very much admired,' she admitted—'very much; but a strange girl, Mr. Turquand. You wouldn't believe how strange!'

He did not press her to put him to the test, but she afforded the particulars as if glad of the opportunity.

He remarked that, in narrating matters of which she was proud, she adopted a breathless, jerky delivery, which provoked in the hearer the perhaps unfounded suspicion that she was inventing the facts as she went on.

'She is *most* peculiar,' she insisted. 'The matches she has refused! Appalling!'

'No?' he said.

'A Viscount!' she gasped. 'She refused a Viscount in Monte Carlo last year. A splendid fellow! Enormously wealthy. Perfectly wild about her. She wouldn't look at him.'

'You astonish me!' he murmured.

Mrs. Walford shook her head speechlessly, with closed eyes.

'And there were others,' she said in a reviving spasm —'dazzling positions! Treated them like dirt. She said, if she didn't care for a man, nothing would induce her. What can one do with such a romantic goose? Be grateful that you aren't a mother, Mr. Turquand.'

'Some day,' he opined, without returning thanksgiving, 'the young lady will be induced.'

'Oh, and before long, if it comes to that.' She nodded confidentially. 'To tell you the truth, I expect somebody here next week. A young man rolling in riches, and with expectations that—oh, tremendous! He raves about her. She has refused him—er—seven times—seven times! He wanted to commit suicide after her last rejection. But she *respects* him immensely. A noble fellow he is—oh, a most noble fellow! And when he asks her again, I rather imagine that pity may make her accept him, after all.'

'She must have felt it a grave responsibility,' observed the journalist politely, 'that a young man said he wanted to commit suicide on her account.'

'That's just it; she feels it a terrible responsibility. Oh, she's not fond of him. Sorry for him, you understand—sorry. And, between ourselves, I'm sure I really don't know what to think would be for the best—I don't indeed! But I wouldn't mind wagering a pair of gloves that, if she doesn't meet Mr. Right soon, she'll end by giving in, and Mr. Somebody-else will have stolen the prize before he comes—hee, hee, hee!'

Turquand groaned in his soul. In his mental vision

his friend already flopped helplessly in the web, and he derived small encouragement from the reflection that she was mistaken in the succulence of her fly.

'You are not smoking,' she said. 'Do! I don't mind it a bit.'

He scowled at her darkly, and was prepared to see betrothal in the eyes of the absent pair when they rejoined them.

As yet, however, they were still wedged in the crowd around the tables. On their right, a fat Frenchwoman cried 'Assez! assez!' imploringly, as her horse, leading by a foot, threatened at last to glide past the winning-post, and leave victory in the rear; to their left, an English girl, evidently on her honeymoon, was losing francs radiantly out of the bridegroom's purse. Kent had paid for sixteen tickets, and Miss Walford for five, before they perceived that the others had retired.

'We had better go and look for them,' she declared.

The well-bred sea shimmered in the moonlight now, and the terrace was so thronged that investigation could only be made in a saunter.

'I wonder where they have got to,' she murmured.

Her companion was too contented to be curious:

'We are sure to come upon them in a minute,' he said. 'Do you also abuse Dieppe, Miss Walford?'

'Not at all—no. It is mamma who is bored.'

'I should like to show you Arques,' he said. 'I'm sure your mother would be interested by that. Do you think we might drive over one afternoon?'

'I don't know,' she replied. 'Is it nice?'

'Well, "nice" isn't what you will call it when you are there. It's a ruined castle, you know; and you can almost "hear" the hush of the place—it's so solemn, and still, and Norman. If you're very imaginative, you presently hear men clanking about in armour as you dream in the old courtyard. You *would* hear the men in armour, I think.'

'Am I imaginative?' she smiled.

'Aren't you?' he asked.

'Perhaps I am; I don't know. What makes you think so?'

He was puzzled to adduce any reason excepting that she was so pretty. He did not pursue the subject.

'There are several things worth seeing here,' he said.

'Of course Dieppe "is only the Casino," if one never goes anywhere else. I suppose you haven't even heard of the Cave-dwellers?'

'The "Cave-dwellers"?' she repeated.

'Their homes are the caves in the cliffs. Have you never noticed there are holes? They are caves when you get inside—vast ones—one room leading out of another. The people are beggars, very dirty, and occasionally picturesque. They exist by what they can cadge, and, of course, they pay no rent; it's only when they come out that they see daylight.'

'How horrid!' she shivered. 'And you went to look at them?'

'Rather! They are very pleased to "receive." One of the inhabitants has lived there for twenty years. I don't think he has stirred abroad for ten; he sends his family. Many of the colony were born there. Don't you consider they were worth a visit?'

'I don't know,' she said; 'one might be robbed and murdered in such a place.'

'With the greatest ease in the world,' he agreed; 'some of the inner rooms are so black that you literally

can't see your hand before you. It would be a beautiful place for a murder! The next-of-kin lures the juvenile heiress there, and bribes the beggars to make away with her. Unknown to him, they spare her life because—because—— Why do they spare her life but keep her prisoner and bring her up as one of themselves? Twenty years later—I believe I could write a sensational novel, after all!'

'What nonsense!' laughed Miss Walford daintily.

'Do you like that kind of story?' he inquired.

'I like plots about real life best,' she said. 'Don't you?'

He found this an exposition of the keenest literary sympathies, and regarded her adoringly. She preferred analysis to adventure, and realism to romance. What work he might accomplish, inspired by the companionship of such a girl!

'Wherever have you been, Cynthia? We thought you were lost,' he heard Mrs. Walford say discordantly, and the next moment the party was united.

'It's where have *you* been, mamma, isn't it?'

'Well, I like that! We didn't stop a minute; I

made certain you saw us get up. We've been hunting for you everywhere. Mr. Turquand and I have been out here ever so long, haven't we, Mr. Turquand? Looking at the moon, too, if you want to know, and —hee, hee, hee!—talking sentiment.'

Turquand, who was staring at Kent, allowed an eyelid to droop for an instant at the conclusion, and the latter stroked his moustache and smiled.

'Such a time we've been having, all by ourselves!' she persisted uproariously. 'Mr. Kent, are you shocked? Oh, I've shocked Mr. Kent! He'll always remember it —I can see it in his face.'

'I shall always remember *you*, Mrs. Walford,' he said, trying to make the enforced fatuity sound graceful.

'We were left by ourselves, and we had to get on as we could,' she cried. 'Hadn't we, Mr. Turquand? I say we had to amuse ourselves as we could. Now Cynthia's glowering at me. Oh—hee, hee, hee!—you two young people are too respectable for *us*. We don't ask any questions, but—but I dare say Mr. Turquand and I aren't the *only* ones—hee, hee, hee!—who have been "looking at the moon."'

'Shall we find chairs again?' said Kent quickly, perceiving the frown that darkened the girl's brow. 'It's rather an awkward spot to stand still, isn't it?'

She agreed that it was, and a waiter brought them ices, and Mrs. Walford was giddy over a liqueur. They remained at the table until the ladies asserted it was time to return to their hotel. Parting from them at its gates, the two men turned away together. Both felt in their pockets, filled their pipes, and, smoking silently, drifted through the rugged little streets, back to the café where they had had their conversation after dinner.

'"Thank you for a very pleasant evening,"' said Turquand, breaking a long pause.

It was the only criticism he permitted himself, and Kent did not care to inquire if it was to be regarded as ironical.

CHAPTER III.

After his friend's departure, the mother and daughter became the pivot round which the author's movements revolved. Primarily his own companionship and the novelty of Dieppe had been enough; but now he found it dreary to roam about the harbour, or sit sipping mazagrins, alone. Reviewing the weeks before Turquand joined him, he wondered what he had done with himself in various hours of the day, and solitude hung so unfamiliarly on his hands that Miss Walford's society was indispensable.

Soon after the matutinal chocolate, he accompanied the ladies to the Casino, and spent the morning beside them under the awning. Mrs. Walford did not bathe: while people could have comfortable baths in the vicinity of their toilet-tables, she considered the recourse to tents

and the sea was making an unnecessary confidence—and she disliked Cynthia to do so, 'with a lot of Frenchmen in the water.' Whether it was their sex, or only their nationality, that was the objection was not clear. She usually destroyed a novel while Mr. Kent and her daughter conversed. Considering the speed with which she read it, indeed, it was constant food for astonishment to him that she could contrive to do a book so much damage. In the evening they strolled out again, and but for the afternoon he would have had small cause for complaint. Even this gained a spice of excitement, however, from the fact that it was uncertain how long Miss Walford's siesta would last, and there was always the chance, as he lounged about the hotel, smoking to support the tedium, that a door would open and cause heart-leaps.

Mrs. Walford declared that the visit to Arques would be 'very jolly,' and the excursion was made about a week later. Kent found the girl's concurrence in his enthusiasm as pretty as he had promised himself it would be, and when they had escaped from the information of the gardien, and wandered where they

chose to go, the chaperon was the only blot upon perfection.

Perhaps she realized the influence of the scene, though her choice of adjectives was not happy, for the explorations fatigued her before long, and, since the others were so indefatigable, they might continue them while she sat down.

It was, as Kent had said, intensely still. The practical obtruding itself for a moment, he thought how blessed it would be to work here, where doors could never slam and the yells of children were unknown. They mounted a hillock, and looked across the endless landscape silently. In the dungeons under their feet lay dead men's bones, but such facts concerned him little now. Far away some cattle—or were they deer? —browsed sleepily under the ponderous trees. Of what consequence if they were cattle or deer? Still further, where the blue sky dipped and the woodland rose, a line of light glinted like water. Perhaps it *was* water, and if not, what matter? It was the Kingdom of Imagination; deer, water, fame, or love—the Earth was whatever he pleased! Among the crumbling walls the

girl's frock fluttered charmingly; his eyes left the landscape and sought her face.

'It is divine!' she said.

He did not disguise from himself that life without her would be unendurable.

'I knew it would please you,' he said unsteadily.

She again regarded the questionable cattle; his tone had said much more.

Kent stood beside her in a pause in which he believed he struggled. He felt that she was unattainable; but there was an intoxication in the moment he was not strong enough to resist. He touched her hand, and, his heart pounding, met her gaze as she turned.

'Cynthia,' he said in his throat. The colour left her cheeks, and her head drooped. 'Are you angry with me?' She was eminently graceful in the attitude. 'I love you,' he said—'I love you. What shall I say besides? I love you.'

She looked slowly up, and blinded him with a smile. Its newness jumped and quivered through his nerves.

'Cynthia! Can you care for me?'

'Perhaps,' she whispered.

He was alone with her in Elysium; Adam and Eve were not more secure from human observation when they kissed under the apple-tree. He drew nearer to her—her eyes permitted. In a miracle he had clasped a goddess, and he would not have been aware of it if all the pins of Birmingham had been concealed about her toilette to protest.

Presently she said:

'We must go back to mamma!'

He had forgotten she had one, and the recollection was a descent.

'What will she say?' he asked. 'I'm not a millionaire, dearest; I am afraid she won't be pleased.'

'I will tell her when we get home. Oh, mamma likes you!'

'And you have a father?' he added, feeling vaguely that the ideal marriage would be one between orphans, whose surviving relatives were abroad and afraid of a voyage. 'Do you think they will give you to me?'

'After I have spoken to them,' she said deliciously. 'Yes—oh, they will be nice, I am sure, Mr. Kent! . . .

There, then! But one can't shorten it, and it sounds a disagreeable sort of person.'

'Not as you said it.'

'It was very wrong of you to *make* me say it so soon. Are you a tyrant? . . . We must really go back to mamma!'

'Did you know I was fond of you?' asked Kent.

'I—wondered.'

'Why?'

'Why did I wonder?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know.'

'No; tell me! Was it because—you liked me?'

'You are vain enough already.'

'Haven't I an excuse for vanity?'

'*Am* I?'

Language failed him.

'Tell me why you wondered,' he begged.

'Because—— You are wickedly persistent!'

'I am everything that is awful. Cynthia?'

'Yes?'

'Because you liked me?'

'Perhaps; the weeniest scrap in the world. Oh, you *are* horrid! What things you make me say! And we are only just——'

'Engaged! It's a glorious word; don't be afraid of it.'

'I shall be afraid of *you* in a minute. How do you think of your—your proposals in your books?'

'I have only written one book.'

'Did you make it up? He didn't talk as *you* talk to *me?*'

'He wasn't so madly in love with her.'

'But he said the very sweetest things!'

'That's why.'

'You are horrid!' she declared again. 'I don't know what you mean a bit . . . Mr. Kent——'

'Who is *he?*'

'Humphrey!'

'Yes—sweetheart?'

'Now you've put it out of my head.' She laughed softly. 'I was going to say something.'

'Let me look at you till you think what it was.'

'Perhaps that wouldn't help me.'

'Oh, you are an angel!' he exclaimed. 'Cynthia, we shall always remember Arques?'

She breathed assent. 'Was this Joan of Arc's Arques?'

'No—Noah's.'

'*Whose?*' she said.

He smiled.

'Not the Maid of Orleans'; it is spelt differently, besides.'

'I believe you're being silly,' she said, in a puzzled tone. 'I don't understand. Oh, we *must* go back to mamma; she'll think we're lost!'

Mrs. Walford did not evince any signs of perturbation, however, when they rejoined her, nor did she ask for particulars of what they had seen. She seemed to think it likely they might not feel talkative. She said she had 'enjoyed it all immensely,' sitting there in the shade, and that the gardien, who had come back to her, had imparted the most romantic facts about the château. Upon some of them she was convinced that Mr. Kent could easily write an historical novel, which she was sure would be deeply interesting, though she

never read historical novels herself. Had Mr. Kent and Cynthia any idea of the quantity of pippins grown in the immediate neighbourhood every summer? The gardien had told her that too. No; it had nothing to do with the château; but it was simply extraordinary, and the bulk of the fruit was converted into cider, and the peasantry obtained it quite for nothing, which was a perfect godsend for them when they could not afford the wine, and she had no doubt much more wholesome besides, though, personally, she had only tasted cider once, and then it had made her ill.

They drove back down the dusty hill listening to her. The girl spoke scarcely at all, and the onus of appearing entertained devolved upon Kent opposite. When the fly deposited them at the hotel door at last, he drew a sigh in which relief and apprehension were blended. Cynthia followed her mother upstairs, and he caught a glance from her, and smiled his gratitude; but he questioned inwardly what would be the upshot of the announcement she was about to make. He perceived with some amusement that he was on the verge of an experience of whose terrors he had often read without

realizing them. He was a candidate for a young lady's hand. Yes; it made one nervous. He asked himself for the twentieth time in the past few days if he had been mistaken in supposing Mrs. Walford over-estimated his eligibility; perhaps he was no worse off than she thought him. But even then he quaked, for he had seen too little society since he was a boy to be versed in such matters, and he was by no means ready to make an affidavit that she had extended him encouragement.

A signal at the entrance to the dining-room was exciting but obscure, and there was no opportunity for inquiries before the ladies took their seats. He anathematized an épergne which to-night seemed more than usually obstructive. Cynthia was in white. He did not recollect having seen her in the gown before, and the glimpse of her queenliness shook him. No mother would accord him so peerless a treasure—he had been mad!

It was interminable, this procession of courses, relieved by glances at a profile down the table. His mouth was dry, and he ordered champagne to raise his

pluck. It heated him, without steadying his nerves. The room was like a Turkish bath; yet the curve of cheek he descried was as pale as the corsage. How could she manage it? He himself was bedewed with perspiration.

He could wait no longer. He went on to the veranda and lit a cigar. He saw Mrs. Walford come out, and, dropping it, rose to meet her. She was alone. Where was Cynthia? Seeking him? or was her absence designed?

'I hope our excursion hasn't tired you, Mrs. Walford?'

'Oh dear no,' she assured him. She hesitated, but her manner was blithesome. His courage mounted. 'Shall we take a turn?' she suggested.

'Mrs. Walford, your daughter has told you what I . . . of our conversation this afternoon, perhaps? I haven't many pretensions, but I am devoted to her—*she* is good enough to care a little for *me*. Will you give her to me, and let me spend my life in making her happy?'

She made a gesture of sudden artlessness.

'I was perfectly astonished!' she exclaimed. 'To tell you the truth, Mr. Kent, I was perfectly dumfounded when Cynthia spoke to me. I hadn't an idea of it. I—er—I don't know whether I'm particularly obtuse in these affairs—hee! hee! hee!—but I hadn't a suspicion!'

'But you do not refuse your consent?' he begged. 'You do not disapprove?'

She waved her hands about afresh, and went on jerkily, with a wide, fixed smile:

'I never was more astounded in my life. Of course, I—er—from what we've seen of you . . . most desirable—most desirable in many ways. At the same time—er—Cynthia's a delicate girl; she has always been used to every luxury. So few young men are really in a position to justify their marrying.'

'*My* position is this,' he said. 'I've my profession, and a little money—not much; a thousand pounds, left me by a relative last year. Assisted by that money, I reckon that my profession would certainly enable us to live in a comfortable fashion until I could support a wife by my pen alone.' Her jaw dropped. He felt it

before he turned, and shivered. 'I'm afraid you do not think it very excellent?' he murmured.

She was breathing agitatedly.

'It . . . I must say—er—I fear her father would never sanction—— Oh no; I am sure. It is out of the question.'

'A man may keep a wife on less, Mrs. Walford, without her suffering. My God! if I thought that Cynthia would ever know privation or distress, do you suppose I would——'

'A wife!' she said, 'a wife! My dear Mr. Kent, a man must be prepared to provide for a family as well. Have you—er—any expectations?'

'I expect to succeed,' said Kent; 'I've the right to expect it. No others.'

'May I ask how much your profession brings you in?'

'I sold my novel for a hundred pounds,' he answered. 'It was my first,' he added, as he heard her gasp; 'it was my first . . . Mrs. Walford, I love her. At least think it over. Let me speak to her again; let me *ask* her if she is afraid. Don't refuse to consider.'

The pain in his voice was not without an effect on

her disgust. She was mercenary, though she did not know it; she was not good-natured, though she had good impulses; she was ludicrously artificial; but she was a woman, and he was a young man. She did not think of her own courtship, for she had only been sentimental when her parents approved—she had not 'married for money,' but her heart had been providentially warmed towards the one young gentleman of her acquaintance who was 'comfortably off.' She thought, however, of Cynthia, who had displayed considerable feeling in the bedroom an hour ago.

'I must write to her father,' she said, in a worried voice. 'I really can't promise you anything; I am very vexed at this sort of thing going on without my knowledge—*very* vexed. I shall write to her father to-night. I must ask you to consider the whole matter entirely indefinite until he comes. Immense responsibility . . . immense! I can't say any more, Mr. Kent.'

She left him on the veranda, and re-entered the house. His sensation was that she had shattered the world about him, and that a weighty portion of the ruin was lying on his chest.

CHAPTER IV.

When Sam Walford ran over to Dieppe, in obedience to his wife's summons, he said :

'Well, what's this dam nonsense, Louisa, eh? There's nothing in this, you know—this won't do.'

'Cynthia is very cut up,' she averred; 'you had better tell her so. I'm sure I wish we had waited, and gone to Brighton instead. . . . A lot of bother.'

'An author,' he said, with amusement; 'what do you do with authors? You do "find 'em," my dear!'

'I don't know what you mean,' she returned tartly. 'I can't help a young man taking a fancy to her, can I? If you're so clever, it's a pity you didn't stop here with her yourself. If you don't think it's good enough, you must say so, and finish the matter, that's all. You're her father.'

'I'll talk to her,' he declared. 'Where is she now? Let us go and see. And where's Mr.—what d'ye call him? what's he like?'

'Mr. Kent. He is a very nice fellow. If he had been in a different position, it would have been most satisfactory. There's no doubt he's very clever—highly talented—the newspapers are most complimentary to him. And—er—of course a novelist is socially—er—he has a certain——'

'Dam it! he can't keep a family on compliments, can he? I suppose he's a bull of himself, eh? Thinks he ought to be snapped at?'

'Nothing of the sort; you always jump to such extraordinary conclusions,' she said. 'He is a perfect gentleman, and proposed for her beautifully. After all, there aren't many young men who've got so much as a thousand pounds in ready money.'

'But he isn't making anything, you tell me,' objected Mr. Walford; 'they'll eat up a thousand pounds before they know where they are. . . . He wouldn't expect anything with her, I suppose?'

She shook her head violently.

'No *earthly* occasion. Oh *dear* no!'

'Let me go and see Cynthia,' he said again. 'It's a funny thing a girl like that hasn't ever had a good offer —upon my soul it is!'

'You ask home such twopenny-halfpenny men,' retorted his wife. 'She is in her room; I'll let her know you're here.'

Cynthia *was* 'cut up.' She liked Humphrey Kent very much—and everything is relative: she felt herself a Juliet. She considered it very unkind of mamma to oppose their marriage, and said as much to her father, with tears on her lashes and pathetic little sobs. Sam Walford was sorry for her; his affection for his children was his best attribute. He said 'Dam it!' several times more, and then patted her on the cheek, and told her not to cry, and went out on the Plage to commune with tobacco.

After his cigar, he explored for a coiffeur's—there is a very excellent one in Dieppe; and he was shaved—an operation which freshened him extremely—and had his thin hair anointed with various liquids of agreeable fragrance and most attractive hues, and submitted his

moustache to the curling-irons. The French barber will play with you nearly as long as the American, and when Mr. Walford had acquired a carnation for his buttonhole, and sipped a vermouth over the pages of *Gil Blas*, it was time to think of returning to the hotel. A pretty woman, who had looked so demure in approaching that the impropriety was a sensation, lifted her eyes to him, and smiled as she passed. He momentarily hesitated, but remembered it was near the dinner-hour, and that he was a father with a daughter's love-affair upon his hands. But he re-entered the hotel in a good humour.

Cynthia went to bed radiantly happy that night, and kissed a bundle of lilies that had cost fifty francs, for the Capulets had relented.

The two men had had a long conversation on the terrace over their coffee, and the senior, who was favourably impressed, had ended by being jovial, and calling Kent 'my boy,' and smacking him on the shoulder.

Nor was Mrs. Walford displeased by the decision, since it could never be said that she had advocated it. 'My daughter's fiancé, Mr. Kent, the novelist, you

know,' sounded very well, and she foresaw herself expatiating on his importance, and determined what his income would be in her confidences with intimate friends. Really, if the house were nice, he might be making anything she liked—who could dispute her assertions?

The Capulets had relented, and the sun shone—especially in Paris, where Kent went in haste to procure the engagement-ring, and the thirsty trees were shuddering in the glare, and the asphalt steamed. But he could not wait, although the stay in Dieppe was drawing to a close now, and they would all be back in London soon. It seemed to him that it would be as the signing of the agreement when Cynthia put her finger through his ring; and he was resolved that it should be a better one than any of those her mother wore with such complacence. Poor devil of an author though he was, her acquaintances should not tell that Cynthia was marrying badly by the very emblem of his devotion!

In the Rue de la Paix he spent upwards of an hour scrutinizing all the jewellers' windows before he permitted himself to enter a shop. He chose finally a pearl and diamonds—one big white pearl, and a diamond

flashing on either side of it. It was in a pale blue velvet case, lined with white satin. He was satisfied with his purchase, and so was the salesman.

Cynthia's flush of delight as he disclosed it repaid him superabundantly, and when the girl proudly displayed it to them, it was gratifying to observe her parents' surprise. The expressions of admiration into which Mrs. Walford broke were fervent, and she felt instantaneously she could increase the income she had decided he should possess by fully a third, in view of so magnificent a substantiation of her truthfulness.

His days were now delicious to Kent. A magic haze enwrapped their stereotyped incidents, so that the terrace of the Casino, the veranda of the hotel, Nature, and the polyglot lounging crowd itself, were all beatified. They were as familiar things viewed in a charming dream—'the pleasant fields traversed so oft,' which were still more pleasant as they appeared to the sleeping soldier. A tenderness overflowing from his own emotions was diffused over the scenes, and he found it almost impossible to realize sometimes that the goddess beside him, who had been so unapproachable a month ago, was

actually going to belong to him directly. It dazzled him, and seemed incredible.

He had once sat down in the salon de lecture with the intention of apprising Turquand of his felicity; but the knowledge that the news he had to give entailed a defence, if he did not wish to write formally, had resulted in his destroying the preparatory lines he had achieved. Delicacy demanded that he should excuse his action by word of mouth if excuses were required at all. To do such a thing in permanent pen-strokes looked to him profanation of an angel, and an insult to the bounty of God.

Mr. Walford was unable to remain in Dieppe so long as the day fixed for the others' return; nor, he said genially, was there any occasion for him to put himself out now that he had a prospective son-in-law to take his place. Humphrey was well content. He understood that the elder lady was a bad sailor, and clung obstinately to the saloon, while Cynthia found the passage enjoyable, and he anticipated several golden hours to which the paternal presence would have proved alloy.

He was not disappointed. Sustained by Heidsieck and the stewardess, Mrs. Walford stayed below, as usual, and he tasted the responsibility of having the girl in his charge. He let the flavour dissolve on his palate slowly. It was as if they were already on the honeymoon, he thought, as they paced the deck together, or he made her comfortable in a chair, and brought her strawberries, and watched her eat them with amused interest, vaguely conscious that he found it wonderful to see her mouth unclose, and a delicate forefinger and thumb get pinky.

'You are sure you have the address right?' she asked once. 'Humphrey, fancy if you lost it, and could never find us again after we said "Good-bye" to-day! Wouldn't it be awful?'

'Awful,' he assented, smiling.

'Such a thing might happen,' she declared. 'You try and try your hardest to remember where we told you we lived, but you can't. It is terrible! You go mad——'

'Or to a post-office,' he said.

She laughed gaily.

'How could you write to me when you'd forgotten the address? You *foolish* fellow! There, *I* was brighter than *you* that time.'

He felt it would be prolix to explain that he was thinking of a directory, and not of stamps.

'Come, after that, I must really hear if you've learnt your lesson. What is it? Quick!'

'You live in one of the seventy-seven thousand three hundred and forty-nine houses in the suburbs that are called The Hawthorns,' he said. 'You would have called it The Cedars, only that name was appropriated by the house next door. I take the train to Streatham Hill—I must be very particular to say "Hill," or catastrophes will happen. To begin with, I shall lose an hour of your society——'

'And dinner—dinner will certainly be over.'

'Dinner will certainly be over. When I come out, I turn to the right, pass the estate agent's, take the first to the left, and recollect that I'm looking for a bow-window and a white balcony, and a fence which makes it impossible to see them. Do I know it?'

'Not impossible. But—yes, I'll trust you.'

He parted from the ladies at Victoria, and, getting into a hansom, gave himself up to reflection. The rooms he shared with Turquand were in the convenient, if unfashionable, neighbourhood of Soho, and an all-pervading odour of jam reminded him presently that he was nearing his destination. He was not sure of finding Turquand in at this hour. He opened the door with his latchkey, and, dragging his portmanteaus into the passage, ran upstairs. The journalist, in his shirt-sleeves, was reading an evening paper, with his slippered feet crossed upon the window-sill.

'Hallo!' he said; 'you've got back?'

'Yes,' said Humphrey. 'How the jam smells!'

'It's raspberry to-day. I've decided the raspberry's the most penetrating. How are you?'

'Dry, and hungry too. Is there anything to drink in the place?'

'There's a very fine brand of water on the landing, and there's the remainder of a roll, extra sec, in the cupboard, I believe. I finished the whisky last night. We can go and have some dinner at the Suisse. Madame is "désolée"; she's asked after you most tenderly.'

'Good old Madame! And her moustache?'

'More luxuriant.'

There was a pause, in which Humphrey considered how best to impart his tidings. The other shifted his feet, and contemplated the smoke-dried wall—the only view from the window attainable. Kent stared at him. It was displayed to him clearly for the first time that his marriage would mean severance from Turquand, and the Restaurant Suisse, and all that had been his life hitherto, and that Turquand might feel it more sorely than he expressed. He was sorry for Turquand. He lounged over to the mantelpiece, and dipped his hand in the familiar tobacco-jar, and filled a pipe before he spoke.

'Well,' he said, with an elaborate effort to sound careless, 'I suppose you'll hardly be astonished, old chap—I am engaged.'

CHAPTER V.

TURQUAND did not answer immediately.

'No,' he rejoined at last; 'I'm not astonished. Nothing could astonish me but good news. When is the event to take place?'

'That's not settled. Soon. . . . We shall always be pals, Turk?'

'I'll come and see you sometimes—oh yes. Father consented?'

'Things are quite smooth all round.'

'H'mph!'

He looked hard at the wall and pulled his beard.

'You said it would happen, didn't you? I didn't see a glimmer of a possibility myself.'

'Love's blind, you know.'

'You said, too, it—er—it wouldn't be altogether a

wise step. You'll change your mind about that one day, Turk.'

'Hope so,' said Turquand. 'Can't to-night.'

'You still believe I shall regret it?'

'What need is there to discuss it now?'

'Why shouldn't we?'

'Why *should* we? Why argue with a chap whether the ice will bear after he has made a hole in it?'

'We shan't be extravagant, and I shall work like blazes. I've a plot simmering already.'

'Happy ending this time?'

'I don't quite see it to be consistent; no.'

'You must manage it. They like happy endings, consistent or not.'

'Damn it, I mean to be true! I *won't* sell my birthright for a third edition! I shall work like blazes, and we shall live quite quietly somewhere in a little house——'

'That's impossible,' said Turquand. 'You may live in a little house, or you may live quietly, but you can't do both things simultaneously.'

'In the suburbs—in Streatham, probably. Her

people live in Streatham, and of course she would like to be near them.'

'And you will have a general servant, eh, with large and fiery hands—like Cornelia downstairs? Only she will look worse than Cornelia, because your wife will dress her up in muslins and streamers, and try to disguise the *generality*. If you work in the front of your pretty little house, your nervous system will be shattered by the shrieks of your neighbours' children swinging on the gates—forty-pound-a-year houses in the suburbs are infested with children; nothing seems to exterminate them, and the inevitable gates groan like souls in hell—and if you choose the back, you'll be assisted by the arrival of the joint, and the vegetables, and the slap of the milk-cans, and Cornelia the Second's altercations with the errand-boys. A general servant with a tin pail alone is warranted to make herself heard for eleven hundred and sixty yards.'

'Life hasn't made an optimist of you,' observed Kent, less cheerfully, 'that you talk about "happy endings."'

'The optimist is like the poet—he's born, he *isn't*

made. Speaking of life, I suppose you'll assure yours when you marry?'

'Yes,' said Kent meditatively; 'yes, that's a good idea. I shall. . . . But your suggestions are none too exhilarating,' he added; 'let's go to dinner.'

The sub-editor put on his jacket and sought his boots.

'I'm ready,' he affirmed. 'By the way, I never thought to inquire. Mrs. Walford hasn't a large family, has she?'

'A son as well, that's all. Why?'

'I congratulate you,' said Turquand; it was the first time the word had passed his lips. 'It's a truism to say a man should never marry anybody; but if he must blunder with someone, let him choose an only child, if possible. Marrying into a large family's more expensive still. His wife has for ever got a sister having a wedding, or a christening, or a birthday, and wanting a present; or a brother asking for a loan, or dying, and plunging her into costly crape. Yes, I congratulate you.'

Humphrey did not express any thanks, and he determined that his engagement was a subject he would

avoid as much as he could in their conversations together henceforward.

He was due at The Hawthorns the following afternoon at five o'clock, and his impatience to see the girl again was intensified by the knowledge that he was about to see her in her home. The day was tedious. In the morning it was showery, and he was chagrined to think that he was doomed to enter the drawing-room in muddy shoes; but after lunch the sky cleared, and when he reached Victoria the pavements were dry. The train started late, and travelled slowly; but he heard a porter bawling 'Stretta Mill!' on the welcome platform at last, and, making the station's acquaintance with affectionate eyes, he hastened up the steps, and in the direction of the house.

He was prepossessed by its exterior, and his anticipations were confirmed on entering the hall.

Mrs. Walford was in the garden, he was told, and the parlourmaid conducted him there. It was an extremely charming garden. It was well designed, and it had a cedar and a tennis-court, which was pleasant to look at, though tennis was not an accomplishment his life had

furnished opportunities for mastering; and it contained a tea-table under the cedar's boughs, and Cynthia in a deck-chair and a ravishing frock.

He was welcomed with effusion, and presented his bon-bons. Mr. Walford, already returned from town, was quite parental in his greeting. Tea was very nice and English in the cedar's shade and Cynthia's presence. It was very nice, too, to be made so much of under the circumstances. Really they were very delightful people!

The son was in Germany, he learnt.

'We could have given you a treat else, my boy,' exclaimed the stockjobber, 'if you are fond of music. You will hear a voice when he comes back. That's luck for a fellow, to be born with an organ like Cæsar's! He'll be making five hundred a week in twelve months. I tell you it's wonderful.'

'"Five hundred a week"!' echoed Mrs. Walford. 'He'll be getting more than five hundred a week, I hope, before long. They get two or three hundred a night—*not* voices as fine as Cæsar's—and won't go on the stage till they have had their money, either. You talk such nonsense, Sam . . . absurd!'

'I said "in twelve months,"' murmured her husband deprecatingly. 'I said "in twelve months," my dear.' He turned to Kent, and added confidentially, 'There isn't a bass in existence to compare with him. You'll say so when you hear. Ah, let me introduce you to another member of the family—my wife's sister.'

Kent saw that they had been joined by a spare little woman with a thin, pursed mouth and a nose slightly pink. She was evidently a maiden lady, and his hostess's senior. Her tones were tart, and when she said she was pleased to meet him, he permitted himself no illusion that she spoke the truth.

Miss Wix, as a matter of fact, was not particularly pleased to meet anybody. She lived with the Walfords because she had no means of her own, and it was essential for her to live somewhere; but she accepted her dependence with mental indignation, and fate had soured her. Under a chilly demeanour she often burned secretly with the consciousness that she was not wanted, and the knowledge found expression at long intervals in an emotional outbreak, in which she quarrelled with Louisa violently, and proclaimed an immediate inten-

tion of 'taking a situation.' What kind of situation she thought she was competent to fill nobody attempted to conjecture, neither did the 'threat' ever impose on anyone, nor did she take more than a preliminary step towards fulfilling it. She nursed the 'Wanted' columns of the *Telegraph* ostentatiously for a day or two, and waited for the olive-branch. The household were aware she must be persuaded to forgive them, and she always was, and relapsed into the acidulated person, in whom hysteria looked impossible, again. But the outbreak would be repeated a year or so later, and she then threatened to 'take a situation' quite as vehemently as before.

'Tea, Aunt Emily?'

'Yes, please, if it hasn't got cold.'

Humphrey bore it to her. She stirred the cup briskly, and eyed him with critical disfavour.

'I've read your book, Mr. Kent.'

'Oh,' he responded, as she did not say any more. 'Have you, Miss Wix?'

'Very good, I'm sure,' she brought out, after a further silence. He would not have imagined the simple words

could convey so clearly that she thought it very small beer indeed. 'I suppose you're in the middle of another?'

'No,' he replied, 'not yet.'

'Really!'

She obviously considered that he ought to be.

'You should call her "aunt,"' exclaimed Sam Walford. 'You'll have to call her "Aunt Emily." We don't go in for formality, you'll find, my boy. Rough diamonds! Take us or leave us as what we are—eh, Emily?'

'Perhaps Mr. Kent thinks it would be rather premature,' suggested Miss Wix.

He talked to Cynthia.

Fruit and fowls might be admired if he liked, and she and papa took him on a tour of inspection. There were moments when he was alone with Cynthia, while her father discovered that there were not any eggs.

'He is very good-looking,' said Mrs. Walford; 'don't you think so?'

'I can't say he struck me as being remarkable for beauty,' said the spinster.

'I did not say he was "remarkable for beauty," but

he has—er—distinction—decided *distinction*. I'm surprised you don't see it. And he has very fine eyes.'

'His eyes won't give 'em any carriage-and-pair,' opined Miss Wix. '*I* used to have fine eyes, my dear, but I've stared at hard times so long.'

'I don't know where the "hard times" come in, I'm sure,' replied Mrs. Walford sharply. 'And he wanted to give her a carriage directly they married, but Sam's forbidden it.'

The maiden sniffed.

'He is most modest for his position. I tell you, he was chased in Dieppe; the women *ran* after him. A Baroness in the hotel positively threw her daughter at his head. . . . He wouldn't look at anybody but Cynthia. . . . The Baroness was *miserable* the day the engagement was known.'

'Cynthia should be very proud,' returned her sister dryly.

'Oh, of course the girl is making a wonderful match—no doubt about it! He sold his novel for an extraordinary sum—quite extraordinary!—and the publishers have implored him to let them have another at his own

terms; I saw the telegrams. . . . Astonishing position for such a young man!'

'She's very lucky!'

'She's a very taking girl. Her smile is so sweet, and her teeth are quite perfect.'

'She was in luck to meet such a "catch"—some people didn't have the opportunity. . . . I once had a beautiful set of teeth,' added Miss Wix morosely; 'but you can't pick rich husbands off gooseberry-bushes.'

On the white balcony, after dinner, Kent begged Cynthia to fix the wedding-day. After she had named one in May, it was agreed that, subject to her parents' approval, they should be married two months hence. He made his way to the station about eleven, with a flower in his coat and rapture in his soul.

The first weeks of the period were interminable.

He went to The Hawthorns daily, and Mrs. Walford was so good as to look about for a house for them in the neighbourhood. He was in love, but he was not a fool; he was determined that he would not cripple himself at the outset by assuming unjustifiable responsibilities, and in conference with the fiancée he intimated

that it would be preposterous for them to think of paying a higher rent than fifty pounds. Cynthia was a little disappointed, for mamma had just seen a villa at sixty-five that was a picturesque duck. He strangled an impulse to say, 'We'll take it,' and repeated that as soon as their circumstances brightened they could remove. She did not argue the point, though the *rara avis* evidently allured her, and Kent felt her acquiescence to be very gracious, and trusted she did not consider him mean.

If he was resolved to avoid burdening himself with a heavy rental, however, he was not deeply concerned about the extent of the outlay made on furniture. As Mrs. Walford pointed out, the things would always be there, and once they were bought, they were bought. In her company they visited the Tottenham Court Road every morning for a week, and this one sped more quickly to him than any yet. It was a foretaste of life with Cynthia to choose armchairs, and etchings, and ornaments, and the rest, for their home together. They had now selected one at the desirable fifty pounds; it was about ten minutes' walk from The Hawthorns,

a semi-detached erection in red brick, with nice wide windows, and electric bells, and rose-trees on either side of the tessellated path. They wanted to be able to drive up to it when they returned from the honeymoon and find it ready for them. Mrs. Walford would procure the kitchen utensils and engage a servant during their absence, and all they had to do themselves was to buy the articles of interest, and settle the wall-papers, and have little intermediate lunches, and go back to the shop, and sip tea while rolls of carpet were displayed. It was great fun.

The pictures in the catalogues, though, never seemed quite realized by the originals, and it was generally necessary to purchase something of a more expensive description than they had proposed. But, again, 'once it was bought, it was bought.' The recollection was sustaining. If Kent felt blank when he contemplated the total of what they had spent, and remembered that the kitchen clamoured still, he reflected that to kiss Cynthia in such a jolly little ménage would certainly be charming, and the girl averred ecstatically that the dessert-service 'looked better than mamma's!' He esti-

mated that they could live with perfect comfort at the rate of two hundred and fifty per annum—for the first year, at all events, and by then he would have completed a novel which, in view of the press notices he had obtained, he believed he could dispose of for quite as much. Even if he did not, there would be a substantial sum remaining of his capital, and with the third book—— No, he had no cause for dismay, he thought; and, indeed, he had not.

They had decided upon Mentone for the wedding trip—a fortnight. It was quite enough, and they would rather be somewhere like that for a fortnight than in Bournemouth or Ventnor for a month. It would amount to the same thing pecuniarily, and be much more pleasant.

'The morning after we come back, darling,' said Kent, 'I shall go straight to my desk after breakfast, and you know you'll see scarcely more of me till evening than if I were a business man, and had to go to the City.'

'Y-e-s,' concurred Cynthia meekly. 'Of course; I understand.'

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. and Mrs. Walford's offering was to be a grand piano—or a semi-grand possibly, since the drawing-room was not extensive—and with a son being educated for the musical profession, it was natural they should wait till he returned before selecting it, so that they might have the advantage of his judgment.

He was travelling on the Continent with Pincocca, the master under whom he studied. On hearing of his sister's engagement, he had at once despatched affectionate letters, and now he was expected home in two or three days to make Mr. Kent's acquaintance, and tender his felicitations in person.

The better Kent learnt to know the Walfords, the more clearly he perceived how inordinately proud they were of their son. Cæsar's arrival and Cæsar's ap-

proaching début were topics discussed with a frequency he found tedious. Even Cynthia was so excited by the prospect of reunion that a tête-à-tête with her lost a little of its fascination, and he occasionally feared, if his prospective brother-in-law did not arrive without delay, he would have been bored into a cordial dislike for him by the time they met. He foresaw himself telling him so at a distant date, when they were intimate, and that they would joke over the matter together. Miss Wix alone appeared untainted by the prevailing enthusiasm, and the first ray of friendliness for the spinster of which he had been conscious was when he caught a glance of comprehension from her little eyes one afternoon after the subject had been discussed energetically for upwards of half an hour. It struck him there was even a gleam of ironical humour in her gaze.

'Enthralling, isn't it?' she seemed to say. 'What do you think of 'em?'

He said to Cynthia later:

'They do talk about your brother and his voice an awful lot, dearest, don't they?'

She looked somewhat startled.

'Well, I suppose we do,' she answered slowly, 'now you point it out. But I didn't know. You see, ever since his voice was discovered, Cæsar's been brought up for the profession. When you've heard it, you'll understand.'

'Is it really so magnificent?' he asked respectfully.

'Oh, I'm sure you'll say so. Signor Pincocca told mamma it would be a *crime* if she didn't let him study seriously for the career. And Cæsar has been under him years since then. Pincocca says when he "comes out" people will rave about him. If he had only had just a "fine voice," he would have gone on the Stock Exchange, you know, with papa; but—but there could be no question about it with a gift like that.'

Kent acknowledged it was natural that they should be profoundly interested by the young fellow's promise, and privately wished that a literary man could also leap into fame and fortune with his début.

The next afternoon when he reached The Hawthorns he heard that Cæsar had already come—indeed, he had divined as much by Mrs. Walford's jubilant air in greeting. At the moment the traveller was not in the

room, however, and Cynthia ran in haste to summon him. Humphrey awaited his entrance with considerable curiosity, heightened by the fact that the mother kept looking towards the door as impatiently as a child towards the curtain that is to disclose the glories of a pantomime.

'I don't know what is keeping him,' she said in her most staccato tones. 'He went to fetch my book. Oh, he'll be here in a minute — or shall we go and look for him? Perhaps he is in the garden, and Cynthia can't find him. What do you say?'

'Just as you please,' said Kent.

But as he spoke the girl returned, to announce that her brother was following her, and the next moment there was an atmosphere of *brillantine* and tuberoses, and Humphrey found his finger-tips being gently pressed in a large, soft palm.

'I am charmed!' said Cæsar Walford with a sweet, lingering smile. 'Charmed!'

Kent saw a fat young man of six or seven and twenty, with an enormous chest development, and a

waist that suggested he wore stays, and was already wrestling with his figure. His hair, which had been grown long, was arranged on his forehead in a negligent curl, and his shirt-collar, low in the neck, lay back over a flowing bow.

'I'm very pleased to meet you,' said the author with disgust.

'I am charmed!' repeated Cæsar tenderly. 'It is quite a delight! And it's you who are going to take Cynthia away from us, eh?' He glanced from one to the other, and shook a playful forefinger. 'You bad man! . . . O wicked puss!'

Mrs. Walford viewed these ponderous antics beamingly.

'There's grace!' her expression cried. 'There's dramatic gesture for you!'

Again Humphrey's gaze sought the sour spinster's, and—yes, her own was eloquent.

He sipped his tea abstractedly. So this was the gifted being of whom he had heard so much—this dreadful creature who bulged out of his frock-coat, and minced, and posed, and was alternately frisky and

pompous. What a connection to have! Was it possible his voice was so wonderful as they all declared, or would that be a disappointment too? In any case, his self-complacence made a stranger sick.

It was about two hours after dinner when the young man was begged to oblige the company, and Humphrey, who was now truly eager to hear him, feared for a long while that the persuasions would not succeed, for the coming bass objected in turn to Wagner and Verdi, and all the songs in his répertoire. He shrugged his shoulders pityingly at this one, had forgotten that, and was not equal this evening to a third. At length, however, Cynthia rose, and declared that he should give them 'Infelice.' *Ernani* was 'intolerable,' but, since they would not let him alone, he crossed languidly to her side.

A hush of suspense settled upon the long drawing-room. Sam Walford fixed Kent with a stare as if he meant to watch the admiration forming in him. Louisa, the hilarious and untruthful, appeared to be experiencing some divine emotion even before the song began. Miss Wix closed her eyes, with her mouth

to one side. Then the young man languished at the gasalier, and roared.

It was a marvellous roar. No one could dispute that he possessed a voice of really phenomenal power, if it were once conceded that it was a voice, in the musical sense, at all. It seemed as if he must burst his corsets, and shift the furniture—that the very ceiling itself must crack with the noise he sent up. The perspiration broke out on him, and rolled down his face as he writhed at the gas-globes. His large body was contorted with exertion, but he never faltered. Bellow upon bellow he emitted to the welcome end, till Cynthia struck the final chord, and he bowed.

'A performance?' said Mr. Walford to Kent proudly. Kent said indeed it was.

The compliments were effusive. It was discussed whether he was, or was not, 'in voice' to-night. He averred that to 'lose himself' when he sang he needed Pincocca at the piano, and sank into his chair again and mopped his brow.

'The amateur accompaniment is very painful,' he said winningly.

Kent made his adieux earlier than was his habit, explaining that he had work to do.

The momentous date was now close at hand, and Turquand, who had not refused to be best man, had made a present which was indubitably handsome in view of his chronic impecuniosity and his opinions. In the days that intervened Humphrey and he alike found it impracticable to banish the important subject from their colloquies, and it was arranged that on the eve of the ceremony they should have a 'bachelor dinner' by themselves, and subsequently smoke a few cigars together in a music-hall. Neither wanted anybody else, nor, in point of fact, did Humphrey know many men to invite. For the time to attend the wedding the journalist had characteristically applied on the grounds of 'a bereavement,' and, though he had not confessed it to Kent, he was more than ever convinced, as he watched him collect his possessions, and pore over a Continental Bradshaw, and fondle the sacred ring, that he had used the right term.

It was a wet evening—the eve of the wedding-day. A yellow mist hung over Soho, and a light rain had

fallen doggedly since noon, turning the grease of the pavements to slush. On the moist air the smell of the jam clung persistently, and along the narrow streets fewer children played tip-cat than was usual in the neighbourhood.

Kent's impedimenta were packed and labelled, and among the litter a brown-paper parcel contained the costume of the groomsman. The coat would be creased by to-morrow, and he knew it; but he had a repugnance to undoing the parcel earlier than was compulsory, and once, when Kent had not been looking, he had kicked it.

The two men put up their collars, and made their way across the square.

'Are you sure we'll go to the Suisse?' asked Kent. 'It isn't festive, Turk.'

'Yes, let's go to the Suisse,' said Turquand grumpily. 'It's close.'

Both were aware that its proximity was not the reason it had been chosen, but the pretence was desirable.

'We'll have champagne, of course,' said Humphrey,

as they passed in, and took their seats at their customary little table, with its half-yard of crusty bread and damp serviettes. 'We'll have champagne, and—and be lively. For Heaven's sake don't look as if you were at a funeral, Turk! This is to be an enjoyable evening. Where's the wine-list?'

'I don't suppose there's such a thing as champagne in the show,' said Turquand. 'Auguste will think you're getting at him.'

Auguste was prevailed upon to believe that the demand was made in sober earnest. Monsieur really desired champagne. Monsieur also considered that he had better run out for it, as he did for the 'bittare' when it was wanted—voilà! Madame, at the semi-circular counter, waved her fat hand in their direction gaily. Monsieur had inherited a fortune, it was evident!

'Well,' said Turquand, when the waiter returned and the cork had popped, 'here's luck. Wish you lots of happiness, old chap, I'm sure.'

'Same to you,' murmured Kent. 'God knows I do. It's awful muck, this stuff, isn't it? What's he brought?'

'It's what you ordered. Your mouth's out of taste. Eat some more kidneys.'

Humphrey shook his head.

'I suppose you'll come here to-morrow evening—the same as usual, eh?'

'May as well, I suppose. One's got to feed somewhere. *You'll* be all rice and rapture then. I'll think of you.'

'Do. I don't know how it is; but—but just now, somehow, between ourselves—— But perhaps I oughtn't to say that.... I say, don't think I was going to—to—— I wouldn't have you think I meant I wasn't fond of her, old boy, for the world. You don't think *that*, do you? She—oh, Heaven!—she's a perfect angel, Turk!... Fill up your glass, for goodness' sake, man, and do look jolly! Turk, next time we dine together it'll be at Streatham, and there'll be a little hostess to make you welcome; and—and there'll always be a bottle of Irish, old man, and we'll keep a pipe in the rack with the biggest bowl we can find, and call it yours. By God, we will!'

'Yes,' said Turquand huskily.... 'Going to have any more of this stew?'

'I've had enough; help yourself.'

'No, I'm not ravenous either — smoked too much, perhaps. I say, Madame doesn't know yet; better tell her.'

She was induced to join them presently, and to drink a glass of champagne, enchanted by the invitation; Monsieur Kent was always très gentil; but champagne! was it that he celebrated already another romance? Comment! he was going to be married—*nevare?* But yes—and to-morrow! Oh, mon Dieu! She rocked herself to and fro, and screamed the intelligence down the dinner-lift to her husband in the kitchen. Alors, they must drink a chartreuse with her — she insisted. Yes, and she would have one of Monsieur Kent's cigarettes. To the health of the happy pair!

Outside, the rain was still falling as they left the Restaurant Suisse and tramped to a music-hall. Here their entrance was unfortunately timed. Some capital turns appeared earlier in the programme, some excellent ones figured lower down; but during the half-hour that they remained the monotony of the material which the

average music-hall 'comedian' regards as humorous struck Kent more forcibly than ever. Wives eloped with the lodgers, or husbands beat their wives and got drunk with 'the boys.' There seemed nothing else—nothing but conjugal infelicity; it was rang-tang-tang on the one vulgar, discordant note.

'I've had enough of this,' he said; 'let's go. What time is it?'

'Time for a quiet pipe at home, and then to turn in early. Let's cab it.'

They were glad to get off their wet boots, and to find themselves once more in their own shabby chairs. But Cornelia had let the fire out, and the dismantled room was chilly. Turquand produced the whisky and the glasses, and, blowing a cloud, they drew up to the cold hearth, remarking that there had been a change in the weather, and a fire would have been out of place on such a night.

'It looks bare without my things, doesn't it?' observed Kent. 'One wouldn't have believed they made so much difference.'

'Yes,' assented Turquand.

'You'll have to get some books for that shelf there, you know; it's awful empty.'

Turquand shivered, and said he should.

'You aren't cold?'

'Cold? Not a bit—no. You were saying——'

'I don't know; I wasn't saying anything particular. I'll write you from Mentone, old fellow—not at once, but you shall have a line.'

'Thanks,' answered Turquand; 'be glad to hear from you.'

'Not that there'll be anything to say.'

'No, of course not. Still, you may just as well twaddle a bit, if you will.'

There was a pause, while the pair smoked slowly, each busy with his thoughts, and considering if anything of what he felt could be said without its sounding sentimental. Both were remembering that they would never be sitting at home together in the room again, and though it had many faults, it assumed to the one who was leaving it a 'tender grace' now. He had written his novel at that table; his first review had come to him here. Associations crept out and trailed

across the floor; he felt that this room must always contain an integral portion of his life. And Turquand would miss him.

'Be dull for you to-morrow evening, rather, I'm afraid, won't it?' he said in a burst.

'Oh, I was alone while you were in Dieppe, you know. I shall jog along all right. . . . You've bought a desk for yourself, haven't you?'

'Yes. Swagger, eh?'

'You won't "know where yer are." . . . What's that—do you feel a draught?'

'No—I—well, perhaps there *is* a draught now you mention it. Yes, I shall work in style when we come back. Strange feeling, going to be married, Turk.'

'Is it?' said Turquand. 'Haven't had the experience. Hope Mrs. Kent will like me—they never do in fiction You . . . you might tell her I'm not a bad sort of a damned fool, will you? And—er—I want to say, don't have the funks about asking me to your house once in a way, old chap, when I shan't be a nuisance; take my oath I'll never shock your wife, Humphrey . . . too fond of you. . . . Be as careful as—as *you* can, I give you my word.'

His teeth closed round his pipe tightly. Neither man looked at the other; Humphrey put out his hand without speaking, and Turquand gripped it. There was a silence again. Both stared at the dead ashes. The clock of St. Giles-in-the-Fields tolled twelve, and neither commented on it, though they simultaneously reflected that it was now the marriage morning.

'Strikes me we were nearly making bally asses of ourselves,' said Turquand at last, in a shaky voice. 'Finish your whisky, and let's to bed.'

CHAPTER VII.

As the wheels began to revolve, he looked at the girl with thanksgiving. Perhaps the top thought in the tangle of his consciousness was that he was relieved the worry and publicity of the day were over. They were married. For good or for ill—for always—whether things went well or went badly with him, she was his wife now! He realized the fact much more clearly here while the train rushed forward, than he had done when making his responses at the altar; indeed, at the altar he had realized little but the awkwardness of his attitude, and that Cynthia was very nervous. And he was glad; but, knowing that he was glad, he wondered vaguely why he did not feel more exhilaration.

They were alone in the compartment, and he took her hand and spoke to her. She answered by an obvious

effort, and both sat gazing from the window over the flying fields. She thought of her home, and that 'everything was very strange,' and that she would have liked to cry 'properly,' without having Humphrey's eyes upon her. *He* speculated whether she would like to cry while he affected to be unaware of it behind a paper, or if she would imagine he wanted to read, and consider him unfeeling. He thought that a wedding-day was a very exhausting experience for a girl, and that her evident desire to avoid conversation was fortunate, since, to save his soul, he could not think of anything to say that was not stupid. He thought, also, though his palate did not crave tobacco, that a cigar would have assisted him tremendously, and that it was really extraordinary to reflect that 'Cynthia Walford' and he were man and wife.

Next, he questioned inwardly what *she* was thinking, and attempted, in a mental metamorphosis, to put himself in her place. It made him feel horribly sorry for her. He pitied her hotly, though he could not say so; and by a sudden impulse he squeezed her gloved fingers again, with remorseful compassion. At the moment

that he was moved to the demonstration, however, she was really wishing that the dressmaker had cut the corsage of her blue theatre frock square, instead of in a 'V.' The engine screamed. Both spoke perfunctorily. He congratulated himself on his character boasting a feminine side which had made such insight into her mind possible. Some men would have failed to comprehend! She felt that the tears with which she was fighting had made her nose red, and longed for an opportunity to use her powder-puff. The train sped on.

As he sat by her side before the sea, he looked, not at the girl, but within him. He thought of the book that had formed in his head, and perhaps his paramount feeling was impatience, and the desire to find the first chapter already shaping into words. They were married. The unconscious pretences of the betrothal period were over in both. To him, as well as to her, the magic, the subtile enchantment, was past. She was still Cynthia—more than ever Cynthia, he understood; but there had been a fascination when 'Cynthia' was a goddess to him, which an acquaint-

ance with strings and buttons had destroyed. The *corylopsis* stood in a squat little bottle with a silver lid among brushes and hairpins on a toilet-table, and his senses swam no more when he detected its faintness on her gown.

Companionship, and not worship, was required now, and neither found the other quite as companionable as had been expected. This the girl in her heart excused less readily than the man. Primarily, indeed, the latter refused to acknowledge it. It was preposterous to suppose, if they did not possess much in common, that he would not have perceived the disparity during the engagement. Then he reminded himself that his life might have rendered him a shade intolerant; he must remember that the subject of literary work, all-engrossing to his own mind, made on hers unaccustomed demands. To try to phrase a sensation, the attempt to seize a fleeting impression so delicately that it would survive the process, and not expire on the pen's point, were instinctive habits with himself; to her they appeared motiveless and wearisome games.

He had endeavoured, in the novels they read together

during the honeymoon, to cultivate her appreciation of what was fine; for she had told him some of her favourite authoresses, and he had shuddered. She had obtained a book for herself one day, and offered it to him. He thanked her, but said he was sure by the title that he should not care for it. She answered that it was very silly and unliterary—she had acquired that word—to judge a book by what it was called. She was surprised at him! If *she* had done such a thing, he would have ridiculed her. And, apart from that, she did not see that 'Winsome Winnie' *was* a bad title. What was the matter with it?

Kent said he could not explain. She declared with a little triumphant laugh that that just showed how wrong he was.

He made his endeavour very tenderly. To be looked upon as the schoolmaster abroad was a constant dread with him when he discovered that, if a similarity of taste were to subsist between them, she would have to advance or he must regress. Sometimes—very occasionally—he handed her a passage with an air of taking it for granted the pleasure would be mutual, but her

assent was always so constrained that he was forced to realize that the cleverness of expression was lost upon her, that the word-painting had to her painted nothing at all.

He wondered if his wife's dulness of vision fairly represented the eyes with which the novel-reading public read, and if it was folly to spend an hour revising a paragraph in which the majority would, after all, see no more artistry than if it had been allowed to remain as it was written first. He knew that it *was*, in a man like himself, with whom literature was a profession, and not a luxury, though he was aware at the same time that he would never be able to help it—that to the end there would be nights when he went up to bed having written no more than a hundred words all day, and yet with elation, because, rightly or wrongly, he felt the hundred words to have been admirably said. He knew there would be evenings in the future, as there had been in the past, when, after reading a page of somebody else's novel with physical delight, he would go and tear up five sheets of his own manuscript with misery and disgust; and he knew already—though he shrank from admitting this—that when it happened he

would never be able to confess it to Cynthia, as he had done to Turquand, because Cynthia would find it incredible and absurd.

The fortnight was near its conclusion, and both looked forward to the return to England with eagerness. He would plunge into his work; she would be near The Hawthorns, and have friends to come to see her. Neither of the pair regretted the step they had taken; each loved the other; but a honeymoon was a trying institution, viewed as a whole.

Presently, where they sat, she turned and put some questions to him about his projected book. Her intentions were praiseworthy; she was a good girl, and having married an author, she understood that it was incumbent on her to take an interest in his vocation, though perhaps, she had fancied once or twice, it might really have been nicer if he had been a stock-jobber, and not cared to discuss his business at home. Papa never had, she knew. Discussing an author's work did not seem so simple as she had assumed it would be. There seemed so many tedious details that did not matter to the story.

'When do you think it will be finished, Humphrey?' she said.

'In nine months, I hope, if I stick to it.'

'So long as nine months?' she exclaimed with surprise. 'Why, I've read—let me see—two, three new ones of Mrs. St. Julian's this year! Will it *really* take so long as nine months?'

'Quite, sweetheart; perhaps longer. I don't write quickly, I'm sorry to say. Still, it won't be bad business if Cousins pay the two hundred and fifty that I expect. I think they ought to, after the way the last has been received.'

'Some people get much more, don't they?'

'Just a trifle,' he said. 'Yes; but I'm not a popular writer, you see. Wait a bit, though; we'll astonish your mother with our grandeurs yet. You shall have a victoria, *and* two men on the box with powdered hair, and drive out on a wet day, and splash mud at your enemies.'

'I don't think I have enemies,' she laughed.

'You will when you have the victoria and pair, be easy. Some poor beggar of an author who's hoping to

get two hundred and fifty pounds for nine months' toil will look at you from a bus and cuss you.'

'Suppose you can't get two hundred and fifty?' she inquired. 'You can't be sure.'

'Oh, well, if it were only a couple of hundred, we shouldn't have to go to the workhouse, you know. If it comes to that, a hundred, the same as I got for the other, would see us through, though of course I wouldn't accept such a price. Don't begin to worry your little head about ways and means on your honeymoon, darling; there's time enough for arithmetic. And it's going to be good work. I've been practical, too. I can end it happily, and retain a conscience. It's almost a different plot from what it was when I commenced to think, and it's better. It ends well, and it's better —the thing's a Koh-i-noor!'

'Tell me all about it,' she suggested.

He complied enthusiastically. She was being very sympathetic, and he felt with perfect momentary content how jolly it was to have a lovely wife and talk these things over with her. Just what he had pictured.

'But wouldn't it be more exciting if you kept that a mystery till the third volume?' she said, at the end of five minutes.

It was as if she had thrown a bucket of ice-water on his animation.

'I don't want it to be a mystery,' he said, speaking more difficultly. 'That isn't the aim at all. What I mean to do is to analyze the woman's sensations when she learns it. I want to show how she feels and suffers; yes, and the temptation that she wrestles with, and loathes herself for being too weak to put aside. Don't you see—don't you see?'

She was chiefly sensible that his pleasure had vanished, and that the note of interest in his voice had died. She, however, repeated her suggestion; if she was to be a critic, she must be prepared to maintain her literary views.

'I think all that would be much duller than if you had the surprise,' she declared.

He did not argue—he did not attempt to demonstrate that her suggestion amounted to proposing he should write quite another story than the one he was talking

about; he felt hopelessly that argument would be waste of time.

'Perhaps you are right,' he said; 'but one does what one can.'

'But you should say, "What one *will*," dear; it can be done whichever way you like.'

'There is only one way possible to *me*, I assure you,' he answered; 'for once "the wrong way" is the more difficult.'

'That which you *think* is the wrong way,' said Cynthia, with gentle firmness.

He looked at her a moment incredulously.

'Good Lord!' he said; 'let me know something about my own business! I don't want to pose on the strength of a solitary novel—I'm not arrogant—but let me know *something*—at all events, more than you! Heavens above! a novelist devotes his life to trying to learn the technique of an art which it wants three lifetimes to acquire, and Mr. Jones, who is a solicitor, and Mr. Smith the shoe manufacturer, and little Miss Pugh of Putney, who don't know the first laws of fiction—who aren't even aware there are any laws to know—

are all prepared to tell him how his books should be written.'

'I am not Miss Pugh of Putney,' she said. 'And if I were, we all know whether we like a book or whether we don't.'

'"Like!"' he echoed. 'To "like" and to "criticise"—— Men are *paid* to criticise books when they can do it; it's thought to be worth payment. Editors, who don't exactly bubble over with generosity, sign cheques for reviews. *I* don't pretend to teach Mr. Smith how to make his shoes; I've sense enough to understand he knows the way better than I. Nor do these people think they can teach a painter how to compose his pictures, or that they can give a musician lessons in orchestration. Why on earth should they imagine they're competent to instruct a novelist? It is absurd!'

'Your comparisons are far-fetched,' she said. 'A painter and a musician, we all know, have to study; they——'

'They're entitled to the consideration due to a certain amount of money sunk—eh? That is really it. There are thousands upon thousands of families belonging to

the upper middle classes in England to whom fiction will never be an art, because the novelist hasn't been to an academy and paid fees. As a matter of fact, it is only in artistic and professional circles—and, one believes, in "Society," as it is called—that a novelist in England is regarded with any other feeling than good-humoured contempt, unless he is publicly known to be making a large income. The commercial majority smile at him. They've a shibboleth—I'm sure it will be familiar to you: "You can't improve your mind by reading novels." They are persuaded it's true. They have heard it ever since they were children, in these families where no artist, no professional man of any kind, has ever let in a little light. "You can't improve your mind by reading novels" is one of the stock phrases of middle-class English Philistia. Ask them if they improve their minds by looking at pictures in the National Gallery, or even in the New, and they know it is essential they should answer, "Certainly." Ask them how they do it, and they are "done." Of course, they don't really improve their minds either way, because, before the contemplation of art in any form can be anything

more than a vague amusement, a very much higher standard of education than they have reached is necessary; only they have learnt to pretend about pictures. It's an odd thing—or, perhaps, a natural one—that an author of the sort of book that they are impressed by, a scientist, a brain-worker of any description, literary or not, talks and thinks of a novelist with respect, while these people themselves find him beneath them.'

There was a silence, in which both stared again at the sea. His irritation subsiding, it occurred to him that he might have expressed his opinions less freely, considering that Philistia was his wife's birthplace. He was beginning to excuse himself, when she interrupted him.

'Don't let us discuss it any more, Humphrey,' she said, in a grieved voice, 'please! I am sorry I said so much.'

'*I* was wrong,' said Kent; 'I have vexed you.'

'No; I am not vexed,' she replied, in a tone that intimated she was only hurt.

'Cynthia, don't be angry! . . . Make it up!'

She turned instantly, touching him with her hand

with a quick, pleased smile, and he set himself to efface the effect of his ill-humour upon her mood with entirely successful results. As they strolled back to the hotel side by side, he felt her to be a long way from him—there was even a sense of physical remoteness. Mentally, she did not seem so near as in the days of their earliest acquaintance. He caught himself wishing he could debate a certain point in construction with Turquand, and from that it was the merest step to perceiving that Mentone would be jollier if Turquand were with him instead. He was appalled to think that such a fancy should have crossed his brain, and strove guiltily to believe it had not; but once again he felt spiritless and blank, and it was a labour to maintain the necessary disguise. He observed forlornly that Cynthia always appeared happiest in their intercourse when the ineptitude of it was weighing most heavily upon himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Kent placed few obstacles in the way of her husband's industry, and installed in Leamington Road, Streatham, he commenced his novel, and deleted, and destroyed, and rewrote, until at the expiration of three weeks he had accomplished Chapter I. Primarily he did not experience so many domestic discomforts to impede him as Turquand had once predicted. Mrs. Walford had obtained a very respectable and nice-looking servant, whose only drawback was having a father in a lunatic asylum, and the frequently expressed misgiving that, if she were harassed by a multitude of orders, she might be overtaken by a similar fate. Ann was so 'superior,' Mrs. Walford explained, and a 'general' had really proved so difficult to procure, that she had not allowed the thought of a hereditary taint

to disqualify her, and both the bride and bridegroom declared she had been quite right. Cynthia confessed later to finding it a little awkward when a duty was neglected, since she was deterred from remonstrating by the fear 'the girl might go mad at her'; but apart from this Ann was an acquisition.

The author's working hours were supposed to be from ten o'clock till seven, with an interval for lunch; but the irregular habits of bachelorhood made it hard for him to accustom himself to them, and it was often agreed that he should take his leisure in the afternoon, and reseat himself at his desk in the alluring hours of lamplight, when the neighbours' children were at rest, and the scales ceased from troubling. To these neighbours he found he was an object of considerable curiosity. He had never lived in a suburb hitherto, and he discovered that for a man to remain at home all day offered much food for conjecture there. Subsequently, in some inexplicable manner, his vocation was ascertained, and then, when Cynthia and he strolled out, people whispered behind their window-curtains, and stared at them with smiles which

suggested that they were not thought very respectable.

Of his wife's family he saw a good deal, both at The Hawthorns and at No. 64, Leamington Road, and his liking for his brother-in-law did not increase. There was an air of condescension in Mr. Cæsar Walford's self-sufficiency that he found highly exasperating. The bass's début had been fixed during their absence for the coming season, and he repeated the newest compliments paid him by his master with the languid assurance of an artist whose supremacy was already acknowledged by all the world. The latest burst of admiration into which Pincocca had been betrayed had always to be dragged by his parents from reluctant lips, but he never forgot any of it.

Humphrey was sure the artist thought even less of him than the neighbours. Fiction he rarely read, he said. He said it with an elevation of his eyebrows, as if novels were far beneath his attention. His eyebrows were, in fact, singularly expressive, and he could dismiss an author's claim to consideration, or ridicule a masterpiece, without uttering a word. There had been more

truth than is usual in such statements when Humphrey had averred that he was not conceited on the score of his unprofitable spurs, but when he contemplated the complacent sneer by which this affected young man pronounced a novelist of reputation to be entirely fatuous, he was galled.

Cynthia had told her mother how hard he was working, and once, when they were spending an evening at The Hawthorns some weeks after their return, the subject was mentioned.

'Well,' exclaimed the stock-jobber tolerantly, 'and how's the story?—getting along, heh?'

'Yes,' said Kent, 'I'm plodding on with it fairly well, sir.'

He was aware his father-in-law did not take fiction seriously, either, and he always felt a certain restraint in speaking of his profession here.

'And what's it about?' asked Mrs. Walford, much in the indulgent tone in which one puts such a question to a child. 'Have you made Cynthia your lovely heroine, and are you flirting with her at Dieppe again? *I* know what it'll be—hee! hee! hee! I'm sure you meant

yourself by the hero in your last book ; you know I told you so long ago.'

He was convinced also that she would say it with equal perspicacity about every book he wrote.

'N-no,' he said, 'I shouldn't quite care to try to make "copy" out of my wife. It wouldn't be easy, and it wouldn't be congenial.'

'You ought to know her faults better than anybody else's, I should think, by this time,' said Miss Wix tartly.

'And her virtues,' answered Humphrey.

'Oh,' said Miss Wix, with acidulated humour, 'he says two months are quite long enough to find out all Cynthia's virtues, Louisa.'

'I didn't hear him say anything of the sort,' said Mrs. Walford crossly. 'Well, what *is* it about? Tell us.'

He felt awkward and embarrassed.

'I can't explain a plot ; I'm very stupid at it,' he said. 'You shall have a copy the moment it is published, mater, and read the thing.'

'I do wish he'd call me "mamma"!' she cried. 'He makes me feel a hundred years old.'

To divert the conversation, he inquired if she had read the last of Henry James's.

'I don't know,' she said. 'Oh yes, they sent it me from the library this week. It isn't bad; I didn't like it much. Did *you* read it, Cæsar?'

Cæsar became conscious that people talked.

'Read?' he echoed wearily. 'Read what?'

'James's last. I forget what it was called—er—something. I saw you with it the other day. A red book.'

'I looked through it. I had nothing to do.'

'Quite amusing,' she said, 'wasn't it?'

'I forget,' he murmured; 'I never do remember these things.'

'It took a clever man some time to write,' said Kent; 'it might have been worth your attention for a whole afternoon.'

The other was not disturbed. Neither his confidence nor his amiability was shaken.

'Do you think so?' he said with gentleness. 'I *can't* read these things any more. There's nothing to be gained. What does one acquire? Whether Angelina

marries Edwin, or whether she marries Charles——!' He shook his head and smiled compassionately. Sam Walford guffawed. 'When I feel that my mind's been at too great a tension, I sometimes *glance* at a novel; but I'm afraid—I'm really afraid—I can't concede that I should be justified in giving an afternoon to one.'

'Cæsar has his work to think of, you know,' put in Cynthia; 'he is not like us women.'

'You'll find it a tough job to get the best of Cæsar in an argument,' added Walford good-humouredly.

'Oh, I don't deny that I *have* read novels in my time. There was a time when I could read a yellow-back.' He made this admission in the evident belief that a book was far more frivolous in cardboard covers than while it was in its first edition of cloth. 'But I can't do it to-day.'

'Well,' cried Mrs. Walford, '*I* must say I agree with Humphrey. I must say I think it's—it's really very clever to write a good novel. *I* couldn't write one; I'm sure I couldn't—I haven't the patience.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Cæsar, with charming confusion; 'it's Humphrey's own line—of course it is. I always

forget.' He turned to Kent deprecatingly: 'Do you know, I never think of you as going in for that; it's a surprise every time I recollect it.'

Kent said it was really of no consequence whatever.

'Well, well, well,' said Walford, 'everybody to his trade. We can't all be born with a fortune in our throats. Wish we could—eh, Humphrey, my boy? Did you hear what Lassalle said about his voice the other day? Cæsar, just tell Humphrey what Lassalle said about your voice the other day.'

'Oh, Humphrey doesn't want to listen to that long story,' declared Mrs. Walford, 'I'm sure.'

He could do no less after this than express curiosity.

'Well then, Cæsar, tell us what it was.'

'Do, Cæsar,' entreated his sister; '*I* haven't heard, either.'

'A trifle,' he demurred, 'not interesting. I didn't know I'd mentioned it.'

'Oh yes,' said Miss Wix. 'Don't you remember you told us the story at tea, and then you told it again to your father at dinner? But do tell Cynthia and Humphrey.'

'I—er—dined with Pincocca last night at his rooms,' he drawled. 'One or two men came in afterwards. He introduced me. I didn't pay much attention to the names—you know what it is—and by-and-by Pincocca pressed me to sing. He said I was "a pupil," and I could see one of the men was prepared to be bored. . . . This really is so *very* personal that——'

'No, no, no! go on. What nonsense!' said his mother.

'I could see he was prepared to be bored; so I made up my mind to—*sing!* I was nettled—very childish, I admit it—but I was nettled. I didn't watch him while I sang—I couldn't. I did better than I expected. I——'

'You forgot *everything*,' said Sam Walford, '*I* know.'

'I did, yes. I didn't think of Pincocca, or of him, or of anybody in the room. When I had finished, he came up to me, and said, "Mr. Walford, I am green with jealousy. Ah, Heaven! if *I* could command such a career!" The man was Lassalle!'

'Flattering?' said his father to Kent. 'Flattering? "If *I* could command such a career!" Eh?'

Kent asked himself speechlessly if this thing could be.

'"If *I* could command such a career!"' reiterated Mr. Walford. 'What do you think of that! He's coming out in the spring, you know.'

'Yes, so I've heard,' said Humphrey. 'Where?'

'That's not settled; here in town, probably, at the Opera House. He sang to the manager last week. The man was—was altogether staggered.'

'Ha!' said Kent perfunctorily.

'There's never been anything heard like it. I tell you, he'll take London by storm.'

'What *I* can't understand,' said Miss Wix, her mouth pursed to a buttonhole, 'is how you didn't know Lassalle directly he came in. Is he the only musical celebrity you aren't intimate with?'

Her nephew looked momentarily disconcerted.

'One doesn't know everybody,' he said feebly; 'Lassalle happened to be a man I'd not met.'

'What do you mean, Emily?' flared Mrs. Walford. 'You don't imagine that Cæsar made the story up, I suppose?'

'"Mean"?' said Miss Wix with wonder. '"Make it up"? Why *should* he make it up? I said I did

not understand, that is all. Quite a simple observation.'

She rose, and seated herself stiffly on a distant couch. Mrs. Walford panted, and turned to Humphrey, who she was afraid had overheard.

'How very absurd,' she said jerkily—'how very absurd of her to make such a remark! So liable to misconstruction. By the way, do you see anything of that Mr. Turkey—Turquand—what was he called?—now? Has he—er—er—any influence on the press?'

'He knows a good many people of a kind. Why do you ask?'

'We shall be very pleased to see him,' she said; 'I liked him very much. He might dine with us one night—when there's nobody particular here. . . . I was thinking he might be useful to Cæsar. The press can be so spiteful, can't it—so very spiteful? Of course, Cæsar will really be independent of criticism, but still——'

'Still, you'll give Turquand a dinner.'

'Oh, you satirical villain!' she said playfully. 'Hee! hee! hee! You're all alike, you writing men; you'll

even lash your mamma-in-law. Aren't you going to have anything to drink? Sam, Humphrey has nothing to drink. Cynthia, a glass of wine?'

The servant had entered with a salver and the tantalus, and Sam Walford proposed the toast of his son's début. They prepared to drink it, and it was noticed then that Miss Wix sat alone in her distant corner.

'Emily, aren't you going to join us?'

'I beg your pardon, Emily,' exclaimed Walford; 'I didn't know you were with us any longer, upon my word I didn't.'

'"The poor are always with us,"' said Miss Wix, in a low and bitter voice. 'If it can be spared, a modicum of whisky.'

'Then, you'll tell Mr. Turquand we shall be happy to see him?' said Mrs. Walford to Kent. 'Don't forget it. You might bring him in with you one evening—I dare say he'll be very glad of the invitation—and he can hear Cæsar sing. What's your hurry? I want to talk to Cynthia. You aren't going to write any more when you get back, I suppose?'

He acknowledged that he was—that he had taken

his wife to a matinée with the understanding—but it was past twelve when they left her mother's house and turned homeward through the silent suburb, to which the railway had just yielded back a few theatre-goers, weary and incongruous-looking. In the cold clearness of the winter night the women's long-cloaked figures and flimsy headgears drooped dejectedly, and the men, with their dress-trousers flapping thinly as they walked by their side, appeared already oppressed by the thought of the early breakfast to which they would be summoned in time to hurry to the station again. The prosperous residences lying back behind spruce, trim shrubberies and curves of carriage-drive finished abruptly, and then began borders in which fifty pounds was already a distinguished rental. The monotonous rows of villas, with their little hackneyed gables, and their little hackneyed gates, their painful grandiloquence of nomenclature, seemed to Kent a pathetic expression of lives which had for the most part reached the limit of their potentialities, and now passed without ambition and without hope. Some doubtless looked forward or looked back from the red

brick maze, but to the majority the race was run, and this was conquest. He was about to comment on it, but the girl was unusually quiet, and the remark upon his lips was not one that would have been productive of more than a monosyllabic assent under any circumstances.

Their front-garden slept. He unlocked the door, and, saying that she was very tired, Cynthia held up her face immediately and went upstairs. After he had extinguished the gas, Kent mounted to the little room where he worked, and lit the lamp. Beyond the window, over the bare trees, the moon was shining whitely. He stood for a few moments staring out, and thinking he scarcely knew of what; then he seated himself, and began to re-read the last page of the manuscript that lay on the desk. He had just commenced to write, when Cynthia stole in and joined him.

'Are you busy?' she asked.

'No, dearest,' he said, surprised. 'What is it?'

She came forward, and hung beside him, fingering the pen he had laid down. She had put on her dressing-gown, and her hair was loose. She was very

lovely, very youthful, so ; she looked like a child playing at being a woman. The sleeves fell away, giving a glimpse of the delicate forearms, and he thought the softness of the neck she displayed seemed made for a parent's kisses.

'How cold it is!' she murmured ; 'don't you feel it?'

'You shouldn't have come in,' he said ; 'you'll take a chill. You'd be better off in bed, Baby.'

She shook her head.

'I want to stop.'

'Then, let me get you a rug and wrap you up.' He rose, but she stayed him petulantly.

'I don't want you to go away ; I want to speak to you. . . . Humphrey——'

'Is anything the matter?'

'I've something to tell you.' She pricked the paper nervously with the pen-point. 'Something . . . can't you guess what it is, Humphrey? Think—it's about *me*.'

A tear splashed on to the paper between them. Kent's heart gave one loud throb of comprehension, and then yearned over her with the truest emotion that she had wakened in him yet. He caught her close and

caressed her, while she clung to him sobbing spasmodically.

'Oh, you do love me? You do love me, don't you?' she gasped. 'I'm not a disappointment, *am* I?'

She slipped on to the hassock at his feet, resting her head on his leg; with the tumbled fairness of her hair across his trouser as she crouched there, she looked more like a child than ever, a penitent child begging forgiveness for some fault. He swore she had fulfilled and exceeded his most ardent dreams, that she was sweeter in reality than his imagination had promised him; and he pitied her vehemently and remorsefully as he spoke, because in such a moment she was answered by a lie. The lamp, which the servant had neglected, flickered and expired, and on a sudden the room, and the two bent figures before the desk, were lit only by the pallor of the moon. Cynthia turned herself, and looked up in his face deprecatingly:

'Oh, I am so sorry; I meant to remind her. See, I'm punished—I'm left in the dark myself.'

He stooped and kissed her. The fondness he felt for her normally, intensified by compassion, assumed in this

ephemeral circumscription of idea the quality of love, and he rejoiced to think that, after all, he was deceived, and their union was indeed, indeed, the mental companionship to which he had looked forward. He did not withdraw his lips; her mouth lay beneath them like a flower, and, his arms enclosing her, she nestled to him voicelessly, pervaded by a deep sense of restfulness and content. In a transient ecstasy of illusive union their spirits met, and life seemed to Kent divine.

CHAPTER IX.

As, chapter by chapter, the novel grew under his hand, Kent saw, from the little back-window, the snow disappear and the bare trees grow green, till at last a fire was no longer necessary in the room, and the waving fields that he overlooked were yellow with buttercups.

He rose at six now, and accomplished about three hours' work before Cynthia went down. Then they breakfasted, and, with an effort to throw some interest into her voice, she would inquire how he had been getting on. He probably felt that he had not been 'getting on' at all, and his response was not encouraging. Afterwards he would make an attempt to read the newspaper, with his thoughts wandering back to his manuscript, and Cynthia had an interview with Ann. This interview, ostensibly concluded before

he returned to his desk, was generally reopened as soon as he took his seat, and for some unexplained reason the sequel usually occurred on the stairs. 'Oh, what from the grocer's, ma'am?' 'So and so, and so and so.' 'Yes, ma'am.' 'Oh, and—Ann!' 'What do you say, ma'am?' More instructions, interrupted by a prolonged summons at the tradesman's door, and the girl's rush to open it. 'What is it, Ann?' 'The fishmonger, ma'am.' 'Nothing this morning.' 'Nothing this morning,' echoed by Ann; the boy's departing whistle. 'Ann!' 'Yes, ma'am.' 'Ask him how much a pound the salmon is to-day.' 'Hi! how much a pound's the salmon?' Meanwhile, Kent beat his fists on the desk, and swore. Once he had pitched his pen at the wall in a frenzy, and dashed on to the landing to remonstrate; but he felt such a brute when Cynthia cried, and declared he had insulted her before the servant, and it had wasted so much of his morning kissing her into serenity again, that he decided it would hinder him less on the whole to bear the nuisance without complaint.

The ink-splashes on the wall-paper testified to his

having raged in private on more than the one occasion, however, and the superior person's feet appeared to him to grow heavier every week. The domestic machinery was in his ears from morning till nightfall—from the time she began to bang about the house for cleaning purposes to the hour that heard her rattle the last of the dinner things in the scullery and go to bed. It often seemed to him that it could not take much longer washing the plates and dishes supplied for a Lord Mayor's banquet than Ann took to wash those used for his and Cynthia's simple meals, and when, like the report of a cannon, she slammed the oven-door, he yearned for his relinquished apartment in Soho as for a lost paradise.

Nor was this all. His wife was less companionable to him daily. Fifty times he had registered a mental oath that he would abandon his hope of cultivating her, and resign himself to her remaining what she was; but he had too much affection for her to succeed in doing it yet, and with every fresh endeavour and failure that he made his dissatisfaction was intensified. He burned to talk about his work, about other men's

work, to speak of his ambitions, to laugh with someone over a witty article; instead, their conversation was of Cæsar, whose début had been postponed till the autumn; of the engagement of Dolly Brown, whom he did not know, to young Styles, of Norwood, whom he had not met; of the laundress, who had formerly charged fourpence for a blouse, and who now asked fivepence. When he pretended to be entertained, she spoke of such things with animation. When he dropped the mask, her manner as well as her topics was dull, for she was as sensitive as she was uninteresting. Her wistful question, whether she had proved a disappointment, frequently recurred to him, and to avoid wounding her he affected good spirits more often than he yawned; but the strain was awful, and when he escaped from it at length, and sank into a chair alone, it was with the sense of exhaustion one feels after having been saddled for an afternoon with a talkative child. The oases in his desert were Turquand's visits, but Turquand never came without a definite invitation. Streatham was a long distance from Soho, and there was always the risk of finding that they had gone to the Walfords'.

It was necessary to book to Streatham Hill, besides, from the West End, and the service was appalling, with the delays at the stations and the stoppages between them, especially on the return journey, when the train staggered to a standstill at almost every hundred yards.

One evening when he dined with them, Humphrey gave him some sheets of his manuscript to read. He did not expect eulogies from Turquand, but he would rather have had to listen to intelligent disapproval than refrain from discussing the book any longer, and when the other praised the work he was delighted.

'You really think it good?' he asked. 'Better than the last? You don't think they'll say I haven't fulfilled its promise? Honest Injun, you know.'

'Seems very strong,' said Turquand, sucking his pipe. 'No, I don't think you need tremble if these pages aren't the top strawberries. Rather Meredithian, that line about her eyes in the pause, isn't it? You remember the one I mean, of course?'

Kent laughed gaily.

'It came like that,' he said. 'Fact! Does it look

like a deliberate imitation? Would you alter it? Oh, I say, talking of lines, I'm ill with envy. "Occasionally a girl kissed from behind as she stretched to reach a honeysuckle, rent with a scream the sickly-coloured, airless evening." The "sickly-coloured, airless evening." Isn't it admirable? What do you think of that for atmosphere? And he's got it with the two adjectives. But the "honeysuckle"—the "honeysuckle" in conjunction with that "sickly-coloured, airless"—it's perfect!'

'Whose?'

'Moore's. I opened the book the other day, and it was the first thing I saw. I had been hammering out a lane and summer evening paragraph myself, and when I read that, I knew there wasn't an "impression" in all my two hundred words.'

'You shouldn't allow him to read, Mrs. Kent, while he has work on the stocks,' said the journalist. 'I know this phase in your husband of old.'

'Yes, and you used to be very rude,' put in Kent perfunctorily. 'My wife isn't. I can be depressed now without being abused.'

Cynthia laughed. She was very pretty where she lay back in the rocker by the window. Her face was a trifle drawn now, but she looked girlish and graceful still. She looked a wife whom any man might be proud to possess.

'You didn't mention it,' she said; 'I didn't know. But I don't see anything wonderful in what you quoted, I must say. Do you, Mr. Turquand? I'm sure "sickly-coloured, airless" doesn't mean anything at all.'

'It means a good deal to me,' answered Kent. 'I'd give a fiver to have found that line.'

'Cousins wouldn't give you any more for your book if you had,' said Turquand. 'Put money in thy purse! I suppose you'll stick to Cousins?'

'Why not? Life's too short to find a publisher who'll pay you what you think you're worth; and they were affable. Affability covers a multitude of sins, and there's a lot of compensation in a compliment. Cousins senior told me I'd a "great gift."'

'Perhaps he was referring to his hundred pounds.'

'He was referring to my talent, though I says it as shouldn't. That was your turn, Cynthia!'

'Yes,' said Turquand; 'a wife's very valuable at those moments, isn't she, Mrs. Kent?'

'How do you mean?' said Cynthia, who found the conversational pace inconveniently rapid.

'I shall send it to Cousins,' pursued Humphrey hastily; 'and I want two hundred and fifty this time.'

'They won't give it you.'

'Why not?'

'Partly because you'll accept less. And you haven't gone into a second edition, remember.'

'Look at the reviews!'

'Cousins's will look at the sale. The thing will have to be precious good for you to get as much as that.'

'It *will* be precious good,' said Kent seriously. 'I'm doing all I know! You shall wade right through it when it's finished, if you will, and tell me your honest opinion. I won't say it's going to "live," or any rot like that; but it's the best work it is in me to do, and it will be an advance on the other, that I'll swear.'

'Mrs. St. Julian's last goes into a fourth edition next week,' observed Turquand grimly, 'if that is any encouragement to you.'

'Good Lord,' said Kent, 'it only came out in January! Is that a fact?'

'"One of Life's Little Ironies"! Hers is the kind of stuff to sell, my boy! The largest public don't want nature and style; they want a pooty story and virtue rewarded. The poor "companion" rambles in the moonlight and book-muslin, and has love passages in the grounds at midnight—which wouldn't be respectable, only she's so innocent. The heiress sighs for a title and an establishment in Park Lane; and the poor "companion" says, "Give *me* a cottage, with the man I love," making eyes at the biggest catch in the room, no doubt, though the writer doesn't tell you that, and hooks him. Blessed is the "companion" whose situation is in a lady-novelist's story, for she shall be called the wife of the lord. Sonny, the first mission of a novel is to be a pecuniary success—you are an idiot! Excuse me, Mrs. Kent.'

'You may give him all the good advice you can,' she responded. 'I've said before that I like Mrs. St. Julian's stories, but Humphrey has made up his mind not to. That's firmness, I suppose, as he is a man.'

She laughed.

'Mr. Turquand scarcely implied that he liked them either,' replied Kent. 'Isn't it painful, though, to think of the following a woman like that can command? What a world to write for—it breaks one's heart!'

'It's an over-rated place,' said Turquand; 'it's a fat-headed, misguided, beast of a world!'

'It isn't the world,' said Cynthia brightly; 'it's the people in it!'

A ghastly silence followed her comment, a pause in which the journalist stared at the stove ornament, affecting not to have heard her, and Kent felt the sickness of death in his soul. Shame that his wife should show herself so stupid in Turquand's presence paralyzed his tongue, and the latter, pitying his embarrassment, turned to the girl with an inquiry about her relatives. Humphrey had taken him to The Hawthorns, as requested, and Turquand, with characteristic perversity, professed to have discovered a congenial spirit in Miss Wix. It was about Miss Wix that he asked now.

Cynthia laughed again.

'Yes, your favourite is quite well,' she answered—'as cheerful as ever.'

'Fate hasn't been kind to Miss Wix,' said Turquand; 'she's been chastened and chidden too much. Under other circumstances——'

'Skittles!' said Humphrey.

'Under other circumstances, she might have been sweeter, and less amusing. Personally, I am grateful that there were not other circumstances. I like Miss Wix as she is; she refreshes me.'

'I wish she had that effect on *me*,' said Kent, as the other rose to go, and he reflected gloomily that he would hear nothing refreshing until the next time they met. He begged him to remain a little longer, and, when Turquand withstood his persuasions, insisted on accompanying him to the station, and parted from him on the platform with almost sentimental regret.

Only his interest in his book sustained him. He had got deep enough into it to feel the fascination of it on him now, and, though there were still days when he did not produce more than a single page, there were others on which composition was spontaneous and delightful,

and happy sentences seemed to fall off his pen's point of their own accord. He wrote under difficulties when the summer came, for Cynthia required more and more attention; but while he often devoted whole mornings or afternoons to her, he made up for it by working on the novel half through the night. More than once he worked through it entirely, merely forsaking his desk to splash in a bath before joining her at breakfast. On such occasions, he was in a very good humour, and, to have completed his felicity, it was only necessary for him to have breakfasted with a woman to whom he could have reported his progress, and cried, 'I've come to such a point,' or, 'That difficulty we foresaw, you know, is overcome—a grand idea!' His exhilaration speedily evaporated at breakfast, and, if he returned to his room an hour later, he did so feeling far less fresh than when he had left it.

Yes, Cynthia demanded many attentions through the summer months; she was petulant, capricious, and dissolved in tears at the smallest provocation. There was much for Kent to consider besides the novel, and also there were anticipations in which they momentarily

united, and he felt her to be as close to him as she was dear. But these moments could not make a life, and despite the fact that the date when their baby was expected to be born was rapidly approaching, he was living more and more within himself. Cynthia had no complaint to make against him; if marriage was not altogether the elysium she had imagined it would prove, she did not hold that to be Humphrey's fault. She found him, if eccentric, tender and considerate on the whole, but he was bored and weary. His feeling for her was the affection of a man for a child, tinged more or less consciously by compassion, since he knew that she would sob her heart out if she suspected how tedious she appeared to him. Though she would have been a happier woman with a different man, the cost of the mistake they had made was far more heavy to him than to her. He realized what a mistake it had been, while she was ignorant of it, and for this, at least, he was glad.

CHAPTER X.

She was very ill after her confinement, and for several weeks it was doubtful if she would recover. The boy throve, but the mother seemed sinking. The local doctor came three times a day, and a physician was summoned for consultation, and then other consultations were held between the physician and a specialist, and it appeared to Kent that he was never remembered by Mrs. Walford or the nurse during this period, excepting when he was required to write a cheque. 'You shall see her for a moment by-and-by,' one or the other of them would say; 'she is to be kept very quiet this afternoon. Yes, yes, now you're not to worry; go and work, and you shall be sent for later on.' Then he would wander round the neglected little sitting-room, and note drearily, and without its striking him he might

attend to them, that the ferns in the dusty majolica pots were dying for want of water, or go to his desk, and compose, by a dogged effort, at the rate of a word a minute, asking himself more anxiously than he had done hitherto what sum he might safely expect from Messrs. Cousins. His banking account was diminishing rapidly under the demands made upon it at this period, and he found it almost as hard to write a chapter of a novel now as a man who had never attempted such a thing before. He returned thanks to Heaven that he was not a journalist, to whom the necessity for covering a certain number of pages by a stated hour daily was unavoidable, and wished himself a mechanic or a petty tradesman, whose avocations, he presumed, could be fulfilled independently of their moods.

It was not until the crisis was past, and Cynthia was downstairs again in a wrapper on the sofa, that he began to feel he was within measurable distance of the conclusion. The nine months in which he had anticipated completing the task had long gone by, but that it would have taken him a year did not trouble him, for he knew the work to be good. He told her so on an afternoon

when they were alone together again, she with her couch drawn to the fire, and he sitting at the edge, holding her hand.

'I'm satisfied,' he declared. 'When I say "satisfied," you know what I mean, of course; it's as well done as I expected to do it. Another week, darling, will see it finished.'

She patted his arm.

'Poor old boy! it hasn't been a happy time for him either, has it?'

'I've known jollier. But you're all right again now, thank God! and I'm going to pack you off to Bournemouth or somewhere soon, to bring your colour back. I was speaking to Dr. Roberts about it this morning. He said it was just what you needed.'

'I've been very expensive, Humphrey,' she said wistfully. 'How much? We didn't think it would cost so much as it has, did we? You should have married a big, strong woman, Humphrey, or——'

'Or what?'

'Or nobody,' she murmured.

The eyes she fixed upon the fire glittered. He squeezed her hand, and laughed constrainedly.

'I'm quite contented, thank you,' he said, in as light a tone as he could manage. 'What are you crying for? Your nurse will look daggers at me, and think I've been bullying you. Tell me—was she kind to you? I've been haunted by the idea she was treating you badly, and you were too frightened of her to let anyone know. You're such a kid, little woman, in some things—such an awful kid.'

'Not such a kid as you imagine,' she said. 'I've been thinking; I've thought of many things since baby was born. Often when they believed I was asleep, I used to lie and think and think, till I was wretched.'

'What did you think of?' asked Kent indulgently.

'You mustn't be vexed with me if I tell you. I've thought that, perhaps, although you don't feel it yet—though you don't suppose you ever *will* feel it—that it might have been best for you, seriously and really, if you had married nobody, Humphrey; if you had had nothing to interfere with your work, and had lived on with Mr. Turquand just as you were. There, now you

are vexed. Bend down, and let me smooth that frown away.'

'Whatever put such a stupid idea into your head?' said Kent, wishing pityingly that he had not felt it quite so often. 'Don't be a goose, sweetheart! What nonsense! I should be perfectly lost without you.'

'I think I suit you better than any other woman would,' she said, with pathetic confidence; 'but if you had kept single—that's what I've doubted: if you wouldn't be better off without a wife at all. Oh, you should hear some of the stories nurse has told me of places she has been in! I didn't think there could be such awfulness in the world. And in the first confinement, too! It makes one fear that no woman can ever expect to understand any man.'

'Hang your nurse!' responded Humphrey. 'Cackling old fool! I suppose in every situation she is in she talks scandal about the last, and where there wasn't any, she makes it up. When does she go?'

'She can't leave baby until we get another, you know. At least, I hope she won't have to.'

'Another?' said Kent.

'Another nurse. Mamma is going to advertise in the *Morning Post* for us at once. We want a thoroughly experienced woman, don't we, dear? We don't know anything about babies ourselves, and——'

'Oh, an experienced one by all means,' he answered. 'Poor little soul! we owe him as much as that. Life is the cost of the parents' pleasure defrayed by the child. We'll make the world as desirable to him as we can.'

He paused for her to comment on his impromptu definition of life, by which he was agreeably conscious he had said something brilliant; but it passed by her unheeded. He reflected that Turquand would either have accorded it approval, or picked it to pieces, and that for it to go unnoticed altogether was hard.

She looked at him tenderly.

'I knew you would say so,' she replied. 'It doesn't really make much difference to our expenses whether we pay twenty pounds a year or twenty-five, and to the kind of nurse we shall get it makes all the difference on earth. What shall we call him?'

'Him! You're not going to get a man?'

'Baby, you silly! Have you thought of a name? *I* have.'

He was still wishing she had a sense of humour and occasionally made a witty remark.

'What?' he inquired.

'Yours. I want to call him Humphrey. What do you say to it?'

'What for? It's ugly. You said so the first time you jerked it out. I think we might choose something better than that.'

'But it's yours,' she persisted. 'I want him called by your name—I do, I do!' She held his hand tightly, and her lips trembled. 'If . . . if I were ever to lose you, Humphrey, I should like our child to be called by your name. Don't laugh at me; I can't help feeling that. That night when he was born—oh, that night! shall I ever forget it?—and Dr. Roberts looked across at me and said, "Well, you have a little son come to see you, Mrs. Kent," the first thing I thought was, "We can call him Humphrey." I wanted to say it to you when they let you in, but I couldn't, I was so tired; I thought it instead. When nurse brought him over to

me, or he cried, or I could see him moving under the blanket in the bassinet, I thought, "There's my other Humphrey."'

He kissed her, and sat staring at the fire, his conscience clamorous. He had not realized that he had grown so dear to her, and the discovery made his own dissatisfaction crueller. He felt a thankless brute, a beast. It seemed to him momentarily that the situation would be much less painful if the disappointment were mutual—if she, too, were discontented with the bargain she had made. To listen to her speaking in such a fashion, and accept her devotion, knowing how little devotion she inspired in return, stabbed him. He asked himself what he had done that she should love him so fondly. He had not openly neglected her, but secretly he had done it often, and with relief. Had she missed him when he had shut himself in his room, not to write, but to wish he had never met her? His mind smote him.

The question obtruded itself into his reveries during the following days, but now at least his plea of being busy was always genuine enough, and he was writing

fiercely. The pile of manuscript to which he added sheet after sheet was heavy and thick, and then there came a morning when he went to bed at three, and rose again at eight, to begin his final chapter, having told the servant he should not go down for luncheon, but that she was to bring a sandwich and a glass of claret into the room. When one o'clock struck, and she entered, tobacco had left him with no appetite and a furred tongue. He threw a 'thank you' at her, and remained in the same bent attitude, his pen traversing the paper steadily. He was working with an exaltation which rarely seized him, and with which the novelist of fiction is depicted as working all the time. In his aspect he was untidy enough to have served as an admirable model for that personage. He had not shaved for three days, and a growth of stubbly beard intensified his look of weariness, due to the want of sufficient sleep.

The wind was causing the fire to be more a nuisance than a comfort, and every now and again a gust of smoke shot out of the narrow stove, obscuring the page before him, and making him cough and swear. The

atmosphere was villainous, but, saving in these moments, he was unconscious of it. He was near the closing lines. His empty pipe was gripped between his teeth, and he wanted to refill it, but was not regained eyes from the paper while he stretched for his pipe and the matches. He was instinctively aware that he should refill it the instant he had written the interest but now an access of uncertainty assailed him, and he could not decide upon them. He stared at the paper without daring to set a sentence down, and drew at the empty bowl mechanically, his palate craving for the taste of tobacco, while his sight was magnetized by the pen's point hovering under his hand. He sat so for a quarter of an hour. Then he wrote with supreme satisfaction what he had thought of first, and rejected as impossible. His pen was dropped. He drew a breath of thanksgiving and relief, and lit his pipe. His novel was done.

Unlike the novelist of fiction whom he resembled exteriorly, he did not weep that the characters who had peopled his solitude for the past twelvemonths, and whom he loved, were about to leave him for the harsher criticism of the world. He was profoundly glad. He

felt exhilaration leap in his jaded veins as he picked up his pen again and added 'The End.' He felt that he was free of an enormous load, a tremendous responsi- again at eight, to [illegible] quitted himself well. Every the ser[illegible] rare exceptions, for a year he had, so to [illegible] this unfinished novel staring him into the [illegible]ght during a year he had gone up the stairs to the bedroom remembering what a lump of writing remained to be added to it still. And now it was finished; nor could he do it better. Blessed thought! If he recast it chapter by chapter and phrase by phrase, he could not handle the idea more carefully or strongly than he had handled it in the bulky package that lay in front of him—the story told!

He was anxious to forward it to the publishers without delay, but Turquand had so recently referred to his expectation of reading it in the manuscript that he despatched it to Soho first. 'Send it back quickly,' he begged, and the journalist's answer in returning the parcel reached him on the next evening but one. He showed it to Cynthia delightedly. Turquand wrote very warmly. The manuscript was sent to Messrs.

Cousins with a note, requesting them to give it their early consideration; and now Kent was asked constantly by the Walfords if they had written yet, and what terms he had obtained. Cynthia had not regained enough strength to care to travel at present, and her parents and brother generally spent the evening at No. 64, where, truth to tell, Kent found the interest his wife's parents manifested in the matter rather a nuisance. His father-in-law evidently held that it was derogatory for him to be kept waiting a fortnight for his publishers' offer, and Mrs. Walford made so many foolish inquiries and ridiculous suggestions that he was sometimes in danger of being rude. Cæsar alone displayed no curiosity in a matter so frivolous, but listened with his superior air, which tried Kent's patience even more. The fat young man's début had been postponed again. Now he was to appear for certain in the spring, and he explained, in a tone implying that he could, if he might, impart esoteric and extraordinary facts, that the delay had been politic.

'No outsider can have any idea,' he said languidly, 'what wheels within wheels there are in our world.'

(He meant the operatic world, into which he was ambitious to squeeze a foot.) 'This last season it would have been madness for a new bass to sing in London; he was doomed before he opened his mouth—doomed!' He looked at the ceiling with a meditative smile, as if dwelling upon curiously amusing circumstances. '*Very* funny!' he added.

Excepting his master, he did not know a professional singer in England, and, whenever a benefit concert was to be given, would chase the organizer all over the town in hansoms, and telegraph him for an appointment 'on urgent business,' in the hope of prevailing upon him to let him appear at it; but his assurance was so consummate that—albeit one was aware he had not yet done anything at all—he almost persuaded one while he talked that he was the pivot round which the musical world revolved. Cæsar excepted, Kent had really no grounds for complaint against the Walfords. The others' queries might worry him, but their cordiality was extreme; and they made Cynthia relate Turquand's opinion of the book—for which no title had been found—again and again. Even the stock-jobber's

view that a fortnight's silence was surprising was due to an exaggerated estimate of the author's importance, and Mrs. Walford, when she refrained from giving him advice, appeared to think him a good deal cleverer now that the manuscript was in Messrs. Cousins' hands than she had done while it was lying on his desk. Indeed, there were moments at this stage when his mother-in-law gushed at him with an ardour that reminded him of the early days of his acquaintance with her in Dieppe.

CHAPTER XI.

'Well, have those publishers of yours made you an offer yet?'

'No, sir; I haven't heard from them.'

'You should drop them a line,' said Walford irritably. 'Dam nonsense! How long have they had the thing now?'

'About three weeks.'

'Drop 'em a line! They may keep you waiting a month if you don't wake them up. Don't you think so, Cynthia? He ought to write.'

'I dare say we shall have a letter in a day or two, papa. We were afraid you weren't coming round this evening; you're late. How d'ye do, mamma? How d'ye do, Aunt Emily?'

'And how are you?' asked Mrs. Walford. 'Have

you made up your mind about Bournemouth yet? She is quite fit to go now, Humphrey. You ought to pack her off at once; there's nothing to wait for now you've got your nurse. How does she suit you?'

'She seems all right,' said Cynthia, rather doubtfully. 'A little consequential, perhaps—that is all.'

'Oh, you mustn't stand any airs and graces; put her in her place at the start. What has she done?'

'She hasn't done anything, only——'

'She's our first,' explained Kent, 'and we're somewhat in awe of her. She was surprised to find that there weren't two nurseries—she is frequently "surprised," and then we apologize to her.'

'Don't be so absurd!' murmured his wife; 'he does exaggerate so, mamma! No; but, of course, she has always been in better situations, with people richer than us. . . . "Us?"' she repeated questioningly, looking at Kent with a smile.

He laughed a negative.

'Than *we*, then! And she is the least bit in the world too self-important.'

'Than "we"?' echoed Mrs. Walford. 'Than "we"? Nonsense! "Than *us*"!'

Kent pulled his moustache silently, and there was a moment's pause.

'Than *us*!' said the lady again defiantly. 'Unquestionably it is "than *us*"!'

'Very well,' he replied; 'I'm not arguing about it, mater.'

'*I* always say "than us,"' said Sam Walford good-humouredly. 'Ain't it right?'

'No,' said Miss Wix; 'of course it isn't, Sam.'

'Ridiculous!' declared Mrs. Walford, with asperity. '"Than we" is quite wrong—quite ungrammatical. I don't care who says it isn't—I say it *is*.'

'A literary man might have been supposed to know,' said Miss Wix ironically. 'But Humphrey is mistaken too, then?'

'What is the difference—what does it matter?' put in Cynthia. 'There is nothing to get excited about, mamma.'

'I'm not in the least excited,' said her mother, with a white face; 'but I don't accept anybody's contradiction

on such a point. I'm not to be convinced to the contrary when I'm sure I'm correct.'

'Well, let's return to our muttons,' said Kent. 'Once upon a time there was a nurse, and——'

'Oh, you are very funny!' Mrs. Walford exclaimed. 'Let me tell you, you don't know anything about it. And as to Emily, I don't take any notice of her at all. She may say what she likes.'

'What I like is the Queen's English,' said Miss Wix, 'since you don't mind. This lively conversation must be very good for Cynthia. Humphrey, you're quite a member of the family, you see. We are rude to one another in front of you. Isn't it nice?'

'I shouldn't come to you to learn politeness, either,' retorted Mrs. Walford hotly. 'I shouldn't come to you to learn politeness or grammar, either. You are most rude yourself—most ill-bred!'

'That'll do—that'll do,' said the stock-jobber; 'we don't want a row. Dam it! let everybody say what they choose; it ain't a hanging matter, I suppose, if they're wrong.'

'I'm *not* wrong, Sam. Humphrey, just tell me this:

Do you say "than whom" or "than who"? Now, then!'

'You say "than whom," but it's the one instance where the comparative does govern the objective in English. And Angus, or Morell, or somebody august, even denies that it ought to govern it there.'

She looked momentarily disconcerted. Then she said:

'All I maintain is that "than we" is very pedantic in ordinary conversation—very pedantic indeed; and I shall stick to my opinion if you argue for ever. "Than us" is much more usual, and much more euphonious. I consider it's much more *euphonious* than the other. I prefer it altogether.'

Miss Wix emitted a little tart laugh.

'You may consider it more euphonious to say "heggs" and "happles,"' she observed; 'but I suppose you don't do it.'

Her sister turned to her wrathfully, and the ensuing passage at arms was terminated by the spinster putting her handkerchief to her eyes and beginning to cry.

'I am not to be spoken to so,' she faltered—'I am not! Oh, I quite understand—I know what it means;

but this is the last time I will be trampled on and insulted—the last time, Sam.'

'Don't be a fool, Emily; nobody wants to "trample" on you. You can give as good as you get, too. What an infernal rumpus about nothing, anyhow! 'Pon my soul! I think you have both gone crazy.'

'I am in the way—yes; and I am shown every hour that I'm in the way!' she sobbed, in crescendo. 'Humphrey is a witness how I am treated. I will not stop where I'm not wanted. This is the end of it. I will go—I will take a situation!'

Everybody excepting the offender endeavoured to pacify her. Cynthia put an arm about her waist, and spoke consolingly, while Walford patted her on the back. Humphrey brought her whisky-and-water, but she waved it aside violently, reiterating her resolve.

'I will take a situation; I have made up my mind. Thank Heaven! I'm not quite dependent on a sister and a brother-in-law yet. Thank Heaven! I have the health to work for my living. I would rather live in one room on a pound a week than remain with you. I shall leave your house the moment I can get something

to do. I will be a paid "companion"—I will go into a shop!' And she went into hysterics.

When she recovered from the attack, she drank the whisky-and-water tearfully, and begged Kent to escort her back to The Hawthorns at once. He complied amiably, and attempted on the way to dissuade her from the determination she had expressed. It was his first experience of this phase of Miss Wix, and he was a good deal surprised by the valour she displayed. Her weakness had passed, and the light of resolution shone in the little woman's eye. Her nostrils were expanded; her carriage was firm and erect. He felt it was no empty boast when she asserted stoutly that she should go to a registry-office on the morrow—nor was it; she probably would do as much as that—she was quite sincere. But the prospect of employment was as the martyr's stake or an arena full of lions, to her mind; and, after the office had been visited, the decision of her manner would perceptibly decrease, and the heroism in her eye subside, until at last she trembled in a cold perspiration lest her relatives meant to take her at her word.

'It will be a small household if you go,' he said; 'I suppose Cæsar won't live at home after he "comes out," and your sister and brother-in-law will be left by themselves.'

Miss Wix sniffed.

'*When* he "comes out."'

'Yes; he seems to have been rather a long while doing it,' answered Kent. 'But there can't be any doubt about it this time; the agreement for the spring is drawn up, and signed, I hear.'

They were passing a lamp-post. Miss Wix's mouth was the size of a sixpence, and her eyebrows had entirely disappeared under her bonnet.

'It always is,' she said. 'The agreements are always drawn up, and signed—and written in invisible ink. I don't seem to remember the time when that young man *wasn't* coming out "next spring," and I knew him in his cradle. He was an affected horror then.'

Kent laughed to himself in walking home; he had suspected the accuracy of the proud parents' statements before, just as he suspected when he had been invited to meet an operatic celebrity at dinner at The Haw-

thorns, who sent the telegram of excuse which was shown him to explain the non-arrival of the star. He wondered how much the Walfords' foolishness and his pupil's vanity had been worth to the Italian singing-master, who gesticulated about the drawing-room and foretold such triumphs.

When he re-entered No. 64, he was relieved to find the company quite cheerful again; they even seemed to be in high spirits, and the cause was promptly ascertained. Cynthia pointed radiantly to a letter that was lying on the table.

'For you,' she cried, 'from Cousins. Read it quickly; we're all dying of impatience, but I wouldn't open it. How did you leave Aunt Emily?'

'She is going to bed,' he said, tearing the envelope apart.

His heart had leapt, and he only trusted he was not destined to be damped by the suggested price. The others sat eagerly regarding him, waiting for him to speak. Cynthia tried to guess the amount by his expression.

'Well,' said Mrs. Walford at last—'well? What do they say?'

Kent put the note down slowly with a face from which all the colour had gone. His lips shook, and his voice was not under control as he answered.

'They haven't accepted it,' he said huskily; 'they are returning it to me. They don't think it's good.'

'What?' she ejaculated.

'Oh, Humphrey!' she heard Cynthia gasp; and then there were some seconds in which he was conscious that everyone was staring at him, and would have paid heavily to be in the room alone. That Messrs. Cousins might refuse the book after such reviews as had been written upon his last was a calamity that he had never contemplated, and he felt absolutely paralyzed and speechless. When he had been despondent he had imagined the publishers proposing to pay a couple of hundred pounds for it; when he had been gloomier still, he had fancied the sum would be a hundred and fifty; in moments of profound depression he had even groaned, 'I shan't obtain a shilling more for it than I did for the other one.' But to be rejected, 'declined with thanks,' was a shock for which he was totally unprepared. It almost dazed him.

'What do you mean?' demanded Sam Walford, breaking the silence angrily. 'Not accepting it? But —but—this is a fine sort of thing! It takes you a year to write, and then they don't accept it. A dam good business you're in, upon my word!'

'Hush, Sam!' said Mrs. Walford. 'What do they say? what reason do they give? Let me look.'

Kent handed her the letter mutely, his wife watching him with startled, compassionate eyes, and she read it aloud:

'"Dear Sir,

'"We are obliged for the kind offer of your MS., to which our most careful consideration has been given."'

('Been better if they'd considered it a little less,' remarked Walford.)

'"We regret to say, however, that, in view of our reader's report, we are reluctantly forced to decide that the construction of the story precludes any hope of its succeeding. The faults seem inherent to the story, and irremediable, and we are therefore returning the MS. to you to-day, with our compliments and thanks."'

'Ha, ha!' said Kent wildly; 'they return it with their compliments!'

'I don't see anything to laugh at,' said his mother-in-law with temper; 'I call it dreadful! Anything but funny, I'm sure.'

'Do you think so?' he said. '*I* call it very funny. There's a touch of humour about their "compliments" that would be hard to beat.'

'Ah,' said Walford disagreeably, 'your mother-in-law's sense of humour isn't so keen and "literary" as yours. She only sees that your year's work isn't worth a tinker's curse!'

'Papa!' murmured Cynthia, wincing.

Kent's mouth closed viciously.

'Against your judgment on such a matter, sir,' he said, 'of course there can be no appeal.'

'It ain't my judgment,' answered Walford; 'it's your own publishers'. It's no good putting on the sarcastic, my boy. Here'—he caught up the letter as he spoke, and slapped it—'here you've got the opinion of a practical man, and he tells you the thing's valueless. There's no getting away from facts.'

'And *I* say the thing's strong, sound work,' exclaimed Kent, 'and the reader's an ass! Oh, what's the use of arguing with you! You see it rejected, and so to you it's rubbish; and when you see it paid for, to you it will be very good. I want some whisky—has "Aunt Emily" drunk it all?' He helped himself liberally, and invited his father-in-law to follow his example. Walford shook his head with a grunt. 'You won't have a drink? *I will;* I want to return thanks for Messrs. Cousins' compliments. It's very flattering to receive compliments from one's publishers. I'm afraid you none of you appreciate it as much as you ought. We are having a very jolly evening, aren't we, with hysterics and rejections? And whisky's good for both. Well, sir, what have you got to say next?'

'I think we'll say "good-night," said Mrs. Walford coldly; 'I will be round in the morning, Cynthia. Come, Sam, it's past ten.'

She rose, and put on her cape, Kent assisting her. The stock-jobber took leave of him with a scowl; and when the last adieu had been exchanged, Cynthia and the unfortunate author stood on the hearth vis-à-vis.

The girl was relieved that her parents were gone. The atmosphere had been electric, and made her nervous of what might happen next. She had been looking forward, besides, to consoling him when the door closed—to his lying in her arms under her kisses, while she smoothed away his mortification. She could enter into his mood to-night better than she had entered into any of them yet, and she ached with pity for him. To turn to his wife on any matters connected with his work, however, never entered his head any more, so that when she murmured deprecatingly, 'Papa didn't mean anything by what he said, darling, I know; you mustn't be vexed with him,' all he did was to reply, 'Oh, he hasn't made an enemy for life, my dear! If you are going up to your room now, I think I'll take a stroll.'

She said, 'Do, and—and cheer up;' but her heart sank miserably. He dropped a kiss on her cheek with a response as feeble as her own, and went out. A woman may have little comprehension of her husband's work, and yet feel the tenderest sympathies for the disappointments that it brings him, but of this platitude the novelist had shown himself ignorant.

Cynthia did not go up to her room at once. She sat down beside the dying fire and ruminated. She asked herself—in the hour in which she had come mentally nearest to him—if, after all, Humphrey and she were united so closely as she had supposed.

CHAPTER XII.

She loved him. When they married, perhaps neither had literally loved the other, but the girl had aroused much stronger feelings in the man than the man had wakened in the girl; to-day the position was reversed, and this perception that he did not find her so companionable as she had dreamed was the commencement of a struggle to render herself a companion to him.

If she had been a woman of keener intuitions, she must have perceived it long ago, but her intuitions were not keen. She was not so dull as he thought her, nor was she so dull as when she became his wife, but a woman of the most rapid intelligence she would never be. Her heart was greater than her mind—much greater; her heart entitled her to a devotion she was far from receiving. To her mind marriage had made

a trifling difference; her sensibilities it had developed enormously. Her husband overlooked the latter, and chafed at the former. Fortunately for her peace, her tardy perception of their relations did not embrace quite so much as that.

She stayed in Bournemouth a fortnight, and when she came home her efforts to acquire the quickness that she lacked, to talk in the same strain as Kent, to utter the kind of extravagance which seemed to be his idea of wit, were laboured and pathetic. Especially as he did not notice them. She read the books he admired, and was bored by them more frequently than she was moved. She attempted, in fact, to mould herself upon him, and she attempted it with such scanty encouragement, and with so little apparent result, that, if her imitation had not become instinctive by degrees, she would have been destined to formally renounce it in despair.

He was not at this time the most agreeable of models; he was too humiliated and anxious. Though Mr. and Mrs. Walford were superficially affable again, he felt a difference that he could not define in their

manner, and was always uncomfortable in their presence. He had called the book 'The Eye of the Beholder,' and submitted it to Messrs. Percival and King, but February waned without any communication arriving from the firm, and once more his wife's parents asked him almost every day if he had 'any news.' His only prop was Turquand, whom he often went to town to see now. Turquand had been genuinely dismayed by Messrs. Cousins' refusal, and it was by his advice that the author had selected Percival and King to try next. Kent awaited their verdict feverishly. Not only was his humiliation bad to bear, but his pecuniary position was beginning to be serious, and the Walfords' knowledge of the fact aggravated the unpleasantness of it.

Messrs. Percival sent the manuscript back at the end of April. They did not offer any criticism upon the work, as the others had done; they regretted merely that in the present state of the book market they could not undertake the publication of 'The Eye of the Beholder.'

Then the novelist packed it up again, and despatched it to Fendall and Green. Messrs. Fendall and Green

were longer in replying, and the fact of the second rejection could not be withheld from the Walfords. After they had heard of it, the change in their manner towards him was more marked. They obviously regarded him as a poor pretender in Literature, and her mother admitted as much to Cynthia once.

'Well, mamma,' said Cynthia valiantly, 'I don't see how you can speak like that. It is terribly unfortunate, and he is very worried, but you know what Humphrey's reviews have been—nothing can take away the success he has *had*.'

'Oh, "reviews"!' said Mrs. Walford, with impatience. 'He musn't talk to us about "reviews"! Of course all those were "worked" for him by Cousins. We are behind the scenes, you know; we are aware what such things are worth.'

This conviction of hers, that his publishers had paid a few pounds for various columns in praise of him in the leading London papers, was not to be shaken. Cynthia did not repeat it to him, and Kent did not divine it, but Miss Wix—who had consented to remain at The Hawthorns—appeared quite a lovable person

to him now in comparison with his wife's mother. Of intention Louisa did not snub him, the stock-jobber was not rude to him deliberately, but both felt that their girl had done badly indeed for herself, and their very tones in addressing him were new and resentful.

In secret they were passionately mortified on another score. Their prodigy, the coming bass, had once more failed to secure a début, and at last there was no help for it but to admit that the thought of a musical career for him must be abandoned. The circumstances surrounding this final failure were veiled in mystery, even from Cynthia, but the fact was sufficiently damning in itself. The wily Pincocca was paid fees no longer, and Cæsar took a trip to Berlin with a company-promoter his father knew, and who did not speak German, while his mother invented an explanation.

Yes, it was a trying time for the Walfords, their swans turning out to be ganders both together, and that one of them had been acquired, not hatched, was more than they could forgive themselves or him. There were occasions, too, when Kent was more than slighted

now, when there was no disguise made at all. One day in July Walford said to him:

'I tell you what it is, Humphrey: this can't go on. You'll have to give your profession up and look for a berth, my boy. How's your account now?'

'Pretty low,' confessed his son-in-law, feeling like a lad being rebuked for a misdemeanour.

Walford looked at him indignantly.

'Ha!' he said. 'It's a nice position, 'pon my word! And no news, I suppose—nothing fresh?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'You'll have to chuck it all. You'll have to chuck this folly of yours, and put your shoulder to the wheel, and work.'

'I thought I did work,' said Kent doggedly. 'Do you think Literature is a game?'

'I think it is an infernal rotten game—yes!'

'Ah, well, there,' said Kent, 'many literary men have agreed with you.'

'You'll have to put your mind to something serious. If you only earn thirty bob a week, it's more than your novels bring you in. What your wife and child will do,

God knows—have to come to us, I suppose. A fine thing for a girl married eighteen months!'

'She hasn't arrived at it yet,' answered Kent, very white, 'and I don't fancy she will. Many thanks for the invitation.'

Walford stopped short—they had met in the High Road—and cocked his head at him, his legs apart.

'Will you take a berth in the City for a couple of quid, if I can get you one?' he demanded sharply.

'No,' said Kent, 'I'll be damned if I will! I'll stick to my pen, whatever happens, and I'll stick to my wife and child, too!'

The other did not pursue the conversation, but on the next occasion that Humphrey saw Louisa she told him that his father-in-law was very incensed against him for his ingratitude.

'It is sometimes advisable for a man to change his business,' she said. 'A man goes into one business, and if it doesn't pay he tries another. Your father-in-law is much older than you, and—er—naturally more experienced. I think you ought to listen to his

opinion with more respect. Especially under the circumstances.'

'Oh?' he replied. 'Have you said that to Cynthia?'

'No; it is not necessary to say it to anybody but you. And it might make her unhappy. She is troubled enough without.'

She had, as a matter of fact, said it to her with much eloquence the afternoon before.

'And another thing,' she continued: 'I am bound to say I don't see any grounds for your believing—er—er—that your profession has any prizes in store for you, even if you could afford to remain in it. You mustn't mind my speaking plainly, Humphrey. You are a young man, and—er—you have no one to advise you, and you may thank me for it one day.'

'Let me thank you now,' he murmured, fighting to conceal his rage.

'If you can,' she said, 'if you feel it, I am very glad. You see what you have done: you wrote a book, which you got very little for—some nice reviews'—she smiled meaningly—'which we needn't talk about. And then you spend a year on another, which nobody wants.

To succeed as a novelist, one must have a very strong gift; there is no doubt about it. A novelist must be very brilliant to do any good to-day—very brilliant! He wants—er—to know the world—to know the world, and—er—oh, he must be very polished—very smart!'

'I see,' he said shakily, as she paused. 'You don't think I've the necessary qualifications?'

'You have aptitude,' she said; 'you have a certain aptitude, of course, but to make it your profession—— So many young men, who have been educated, could write a novel. *You* happen to have done it; others haven't the time. They open a business, or go on the Stock Exchange, or perhaps they haven't the patience. I'm afraid your publishers did you a mistaken kindness by those unfortunate reviews.'

'How do you mean?' he asked. 'Yes, the reviewers didn't agree with you, did they?'

She smiled again, and spread her hands abroad expressively.

'Oh, they were very pretty, very nice to have; but—er—newspaper notices do not take *us* in. Naturally,

those were paid for. Cousins and Co. arranged with the papers for all that.'

'With——'

He looked at her open-mouthed, as the names of some of the journals in which he had been eulogized recurred to him.

'With them all,' she said. 'Oh yes! You must remember we are quite behind the scenes.'

'Pincocca,' he said musingly. 'Yes, you knew Pincocca! But he was a singing-master, and he doesn't come here now.'

'Oh, Pincocca was one of many—one of very many.' She giggled nervously. 'How very laughable that you should suppose I meant Pincocca! You mustn't forget that Cæsar knows everybody. I'm almost glad he isn't going in for the stage on that account. He brought such crowds to the house at one time that really we lived in a whirl. I believe—between ourselves—that this man he has gone to Berlin with is at the bottom of his throwing up his career. A financier. A Mr. McCullough. One of the greatest powers in the City. And—er—Cæsar was always wonderfully shrewd in these things. Don't

say anything, but I believe McCullough wants to keep him.'

'I won't say a word,' he said.

'McCullough controls millions,' she gasped; 'and your father-in-law thinks, from certain rumours he has heard, that he's persuaded Cæsar to join him in some negotiations he has with the German Government. Of course we mustn't breathe a whisper—hush! What were we saying? Oh yes, I'm afraid those unfortunate reviews have done you more harm than good. Nothing great in the City can be got for you, because you haven't the commercial experience, but a clerkship would be better than doing nothing. You must really think about it, Humphrey, if you can't do anything for yourself. As your father-in-law says, you are sitting down with your hands in your pockets, eating up your last few pounds.' It occurred to her that a clerkship and the ease with which her son was obtaining a partnership in millions formed a contrast. 'Of course,' she added, 'Cæsar always did have a head for finance. And—er—he's a way with him. He has aplomb and address that make him

immensely valuable for negotiations with a Government. It's different in his case.'

Kent left her, and cursed aloud. He went the same evening to Turquand's, partly as a relief to his feelings, and partly to ask his friend's opinion of the feasibility of his procuring any journalistic work.

'For Heaven's sake, talk!' he exclaimed, as he went in and flung himself down in the rickety chair that used to be his own. 'Say anything you like, but talk. I've just had an hour and a half of my mother-in-law neat! Take the taste out of my mouth. Turk, I wish I were dead! What the devil is to be the end of it? The Walfords say "a clerkship"! Oh, my God, you should hear the Walfords! I've "a little aptitude," but I mustn't be conceited. I mustn't seriously call myself a novelist. I've frivolled away a year on "The Eye of the Beholder," and Cousins squared the reviewers for me on the *Spectator* and the *Saturday* and the rest! Look here, I must get something to do. Don't you know of anything? can't you introduce me to an editor who wants a genius? isn't there anything stirring at all? *I*'m buried; I live in a red-brick tomb in Streatham;

I hear nothing, and see nobody, except my blasted parents-in-law. But you're in the thick of it; you sniff the mud of Fleet Street every day; you're the salaried sub of a paper that's going to put a cover on itself, and "throw it in" at the penny; you——'

'"'Ave flung my tharsands gily ter the benefit of tride,
And gin'rally (they tells me) done the grand,"'

said Turquand.

'Yes; I know all about that; but surely you can advise me of a chance? I don't say an opening, but a chance of an opening. Man alive, the outlook's as dark as the devil! I shall be stony directly. You must!'

'Fendalls have still not written, eh?'

'No; Fendalls' regrets haven't come yet. How about short stories?'

'You didn't find 'em particularly lucrative, did you?'

'A guinea each; one in six months. No; but I want to be invited to contribute: "Can you let us have anything this month, Mr. Kent?"'

'My dear chap! should I have stuck to *The Outpost* all these years if I had such advice to give away? I

did'—he coughed, and spat out an invisible shred of tobacco—'I did stick to it.'

'You weren't going to say that. You were going to say, "I did advise you once, but you would marry." Well, I don't complain that I married. The only fault I have to find with my wife is that she's the Walfords' daughter. She's not literary, but she's a very good girl. Don't blink facts, Turk; my money would have lasted longer if I hadn't married, but I shouldn't have got my novel taken because I was single. The point of this situation is that, after being lauded to the skies by every paper of importance in England, I can't place the book I write next at any price at all, nor find a way to earn bread and cheese by my pen! If a musician had got such criticisms on a composition, he would be a made man. If an artist had had them on a picture, the ball would be at his feet. If an actor had got them on a performance, he would be offered engagements at a hundred a week. In Literature alone such an anomalous and damnable condition of affairs as mine is possible. You can't deny it.'

'I don't,' said Turquand.

CHAPTER XIII.

Nor did the conference, which was protracted until a late hour, provide an outlet to the dilemma; it was agreeable, but it did not lead anywhere. If he should hear of anything, he would certainly let the other know; that was the most the sub-editor could say. Authors are not offered salaries to write their novels, and Kent was not a journalist by temperament, nor possessed of any journalistic experience. As to tales or articles for *The Outpost*, that paper did not publish feuilletons, and their rate for other matter was seven and sixpence a column. However, some attempt had to be made, and Kent went to town every day, and Cynthia saw less of him than when he had been writing 'The Eye of the Beholder.' He hunted up his few acquaintances, and haunted the literary club that he

had joined in the flush of his success. He applied for various posts that he saw were vacant by the *Daily News*, and inserted a skilfully-framed advertisement in the *Athenæum*. No answer ever arrived, and the tradesmen's bills, and the poor rates, and the gas notices, and the very competent nurse's wages, continued to fall due in the meanwhile. When the competent nurse's were not due, the incipient lunatic's were. Dr. Roberts' account came in, and the sight of his pass-book now literally terrified the young man.

They had not been married quite two years yet, and he asked himself if they had been extravagant, in view of this evidence of the rapidity with which money had melted; but, excepting the style in which they had furnished, he could not perceive any cause for such self-reproach. They had lived comfortably, of course, but if the novel had been placed when it was finished, they could have continued to live just as comfortably while he wrote the next. He feared they would have to take a bill of sale on the too expensive furniture, and that way lay destitution. Cynthia's composure under the circumstances surprised him. He told her so.

'It will all come right,' she said. 'You are sure to get something soon, and perhaps Fendall and Green will accept "The Eye of the Beholder"—fulsomely.'

This was an improvement, for a few months since she would have been unable to recollect the firm's name, and have referred to them vaguely as 'the publishers.' He felt the sense of intimacy deepen as 'Fendall and Green' dropped glibly from her lips, and the 'fulsomely' made him feel quite warm towards her.

'Have you told your people how low we are?' he asked.

She shook her head.

'Why should I? That is our affair.'

'So it is,' he assented. 'Poor little girl! it's awful rough on you, though. I wonder you aren't playing with straws. You didn't know what economy meant when we married.'

Praise from him was nectar and ambrosia to her. She wanted to embrace him, but felt that if she embraced the opportunity to give a happy definition of economy it would be appreciated better. She

perched herself on the arm of his chair, and struggled to evolve an epigram. As she could not think of one, she said:

'What nonsense!'

'I wish you had read the book, and liked it,' said Kent, speaking spontaneously.

'Say you wish I'd read it?' replied his wife.

'Oh, you'd like it, because it was mine. But I mean I wish——'

'What?'

'I don't know.'

She twisted a piece of his hair round her finger.

'My taste is much maturer than it was,' she averred, with satisfaction. 'Somehow, I can't stand the sort of things that used to please me; I don't know how I was able to read them. They bore me now.'

He smiled. As she had often done to him before, she seemed a child masquerading in a woman's robes.

'You're getting quite a critic!'

'Well,' she said happily, 'you'll laugh, but I got "A Peacock's Tail" from the library, and when the review in the *Chronicle* came out, the reviewer said

just what I'd felt about it. He did. I'm not such a silly as you think, you see.'

'My dear!' he cried, 'I never thought you were a "silly."'

'Not very wise, though. Oh, I know what I lack, Humphrey; but I *am* better than I was—I am really! Remember, I never heard Literature talked about until I met you; it was all new to me when we married, and — if you've noticed it — you aren't very, *very* interested in anything else. The longer we live together, the more—the nicer I shall be.'

He answered lightly:

'You are nice enough now.'

But he was touched.

After a long pause, and as if uttering the conclusion of a train of thought aloud, she murmured:

'Baby's got *your* shaped head.'

'I hope to God it'll be worth more to him than mine to me!' he exclaimed.

She was silent again.

'What are you so serious for, all of a sudden?' he said, looking round.

Cynthia bent over him quickly with a caress, and sprang up.

'It was you who wanted the *t's* crossed for once,' she said tremulously. 'There, now I must go and knock at the nursery door, and ask if I'm allowed to go in.'

The man of acute perceptions wondered what she meant, and in what way he had shown himself dull at comprehending so transparent a girl.

It was in October, when less than twenty pounds remained to them, that something at last turned up. Turquand had learnt that a sub-editor was required on *The World and his Wife*, a weekly journal recently started for the benefit of the English and Americans in Paris. The editor was familiarly known as 'Billy' Beaufort, and the proprietor was a sporting Baronet who had reduced his income from fourteen thousand per annum to eight by financing, and providing with the diamonds, which were the brightest feature of her performances, a lady who fancied she was an actress. Beaufort had been the one dramatic critic who did not say she was painful, and it was Beaufort who had latterly assured the Baronet that *The World and his*

Wife would realize a fortune. He had gone about London assuring people that various enterprises would realize a fortune for thirteen years—that was his business—but the Baronet was the first person who believed him. Then Billy Beaufort took his watch, and his scarf-pin, and his sleeve-links away from Attenborough's—when in funds he could always pawn himself for a considerable amount—and turned up at the club, whose secretary had been writing him unkind letters on the subject of his subscription, resplendent again. The only alloy to his complacence, though it did not diminish it to any appreciable degree, was that he was scarcely more qualified to edit a paper than was a landsman to navigate a ship. He described himself as a journalist, and the description was probably as accurate as any other he could have furnished of a definite order; but he was a journalist whose attainments were limited to puffing a prospectus and serving up a réchauffé from *Truth*. He was never attached to a paper for longer than two or three months, but while he was so he was usually attached to a woman too. He drove in hansoms every day of the year;

always appeared to have bought his hat half an hour ago; affected a big picotee as a buttonhole, and lived heaven alone knew how. While he was ridiculed in Fleet Street as a penman, he was treated with deference there on account of his reputed smartness in the City, and—while the City laughed at his business pretensions—there he was respected for his supposed abilities in Fleet Street. So he beamed out of the hansoms perkily, and drove from one atmosphere of esteem to another, waving a gloved hand to clever men who envied him en route.

In days gone by he had tasted a spell of actual prosperity. By what coup he had made the money, and how he had lost it, are details, but he had now developed the fatal symptom of loving to dwell upon that period when he had been so lucky, and so courted, and so rich. There is hope for the man who boasts of the thousands he means to make in the future; there is hope for the bore who proses ever so mendaciously about his successes in the present. But the man whose passion it is to brag about his past is doomed; he is a man who will succeed no more.

If the sporting Baronet had observed this fact, *The World and his Wife* would never have been started, and Billy Beaufort would not have been looking for a sub-editor to do the work of it.

Kent obtained the post. The 'sub' with whom Beaufort had parted was a thoroughly experienced journalist, who had put his chief in the way of things, but had subsequently called him an ass, and what 'Billy' sought now was a zealous young man who would have no excuse for giving himself airs. Beaufort believed in Turquand's opinion, and had always thought him a fool for being so shabby, knowing him to have ten times the brain-power he possessed himself, and Turquand had blown Humphrey's trumpet sturdily. He did more than merely recommend him; he declared —with a recollection of the nurse and baby—that Kent was *the* man to get, but he was afraid it would not be worth his while to accept less than seven pounds a week. When the matter was settled, Humphrey sought his friend again, and, wringing his hand, exclaimed:

'You're a pal; but—but, I say, what are a sub-editor's duties?'

Exhilaration and misgiving were mixed in equal parts in his breast.

Turquand laughed, as nearly as he could be said to ever approach a laugh.

'The sub on *The World and his Wife* will have to cut "pars" out of the English society journals and the Paris "dailies," and "put 'em all in different language—the more indifferent, the better." He must handle the scissors without fatigue, and arrange with someone on this side to supply a column of London theatrical news every week—out of the previous Saturday's *Telegraph*. Say with *me*. It's worth a guinea, and I may as well have it as anybody else.'

'You are appointed our London dramatic critic,' said Kent. 'Won't you have thirty bob?'

'A guinea's the market price; and I can have some cards printed, and go to the theatres for nothing, you see, when I feel like it. They don't take any stock in *The Outpost*. He must attend the représentations générales himself, and make all the acquaintances he can, "against the time" when the rag "busts."'

'"Busts!"' echoed Kent. 'Is it going to bust?'

'Oh, it won't live, my boy. If it had been a permanent job, I shouldn't have handed it over to you. I'm not a philanthropist. But it will give you a chance to turn round, and an enlightened publisher may discern the merits of "The Eye of the Beholder" in the meanwhile. You'd better go on looking for something while you are on the thing; perhaps you'll be able to get the Paris Correspondence for a paper, if you try.'

'What more? What besides the scissors—nothing?'

'There's the paste; I don't imagine you'll need much else.'

'You're a trump!' repeated Kent gratefully. 'I feel an awful fraud taking such a berth, Turk; but in this world one has to do what one——'

'Can't!'

'Exactly; and, by George! it seems a better-paid line than what one can, though I should have thought it was more over-crowded.'

'There is always room at the top, you know,' said Turquand. 'When you rise in what you can't do, the emolument is dazzling!'

Beaufort was returning to Paris the same day, and he

was anxious for Kent to join him there with all possible speed. Kent's first intention was to go alone, and let Cynthia follow him at her leisure; but when he reached home and cried, '"Mary, you shall ride in your carriage, and Charles shall go to Eton!"' she would not hear of it.

'I can be ready by Wednesday or Thursday at the latest,' she exclaimed delightedly, when the explanation was forthcoming. 'What did you mean by "Charles" and "Mary"? Oh, Humphrey, didn't I tell you it would all come all right! How lovely! and how astonished mamma and papa will be!'

'Yes, I fancy it will surprise 'em a trifle,' he said. 'We'll go round there this evening, shall we? And we'll put the salary in francs—it sounds more.' He hesitated. 'I say, do you think nurse will mind living in Paris?'

Cynthia paled.

'I must ask her; I hadn't thought of that. Oh . . . oh, I dare say I shall be able to persuade her. It's rather a hurry for her, though, isn't it? She does so dislike being hurried.'

'Tell her at once, then,' he suggested; 'she'll have

all the more time to prepare in. Run up to her now.'

'Let—let us think,' murmured Cynthia; 'we'll consider. . . . Ann must be sent away, and we shall have to give her a month's wages instead of notice.'

'She's no loss,' he observed. 'I don't know what your mother ever saw in her. She can't even cook a steak, the wench!'

'She fries them, dear.'

'I know she does,' said Kent. 'A woman who'd fry a steak would do a murder! Well, we shall have to give her a month's wages instead of notice—it's an iniquitous law! But what about nurse?'

'Perhaps,' said Cynthia nervously, 'if *you* were to mention it to her, darling—if you don't mind——'

'Of course I don't mind,' he answered, but without alacrity. 'What an idea! Tell Ann to send her down.'

She entered presently, an important young person in a stiff white frock; and he played with the newspaper, trying to feel that he had grown quite accustomed to seeing an important young person in his service.

'You wished to speak to me, madam, but baby will be waking directly.'

'I shan't keep you a moment,' said Kent. 'Er—er—your mistress and I are going to Paris; we shall be there some time. I suppose it's all the same to you where you live? We want you to be ready by Thursday, nurse.'

'To Paris!' said nurse, with cold amazement, and a pause that said even more.

Cynthia became immediately engrossed by a bowl of flowers over which she had been bending, and Kent felt that, after all, Paris was a long way off.

'I suppose it's all the same to you where you are?' he said again, though he no longer supposed anything of the sort. 'And there are three days for you to pack in, you know—three nice full days.'

'Three days, sir,' she echoed reproachfully, 'to go abroad! May I ask you if you would be staying in a place like that all the winter, sir?'

'Yes, certainly through the winter—or probably so. It might not be so long; it depends.'

'I could not hundertake to leave 'ome for good, sir,'

said the nurse. 'I am engaged! My friend lives in 'Olloway, and——'

'Oh, it wouldn't be for good,' declared Cynthia ingratiatingly; 'we couldn't stay there for good ourselves — oh no! And, of course, if you found we stopped too long to suit you, nurse, why, you could leave us when you liked, couldn't you? Though Mr. Kent and I would both be very sorry to lose you, I'm sure.'

They looked at her pleadingly while she meditated.

'What baby will do, *Hi* don't know, madam,' she said, 'changing his cow, poor little dear!'

'Will it hurt him?' demanded the mother and father, in a breath.

'If you have the doctor's consent, madam, you may *chance* it. It isn't a thing that *Hi* would ever advise.'

'Well, well, look here,' said Kent; 'we'll see Dr. Roberts about it to-day, and if he says there's no risk, that'll settle it. You will get ready to start Thursday morning, nurse.'

'I will *hendeavour* to do so, sir,' she said with dignity.

They felt that on the whole she had been gracious, and Kent, having obtained Dr. Roberts' sanction to change the cow, commissioned a house-agent to try to let No. 64 furnished at four guineas a week.

CHAPTER XIV.

In case he should feel unduly elated, 'The Eye of the Beholder' came back on Wednesday afternoon, but this time he did not post it to another firm instanter. He could not very well ask for it to be returned to Paris, and he left it with Turquand when he bade him good-bye. 'Send it where you like,' he begged; 'perhaps you might try Farqueharsen next. Yes, I've rather a fancy for Farqueharsen; but let it make the round, old chap, and drop me a line when there aren't any more publishers for it to go to.'

The nurse's 'endeavour' had been crowned by success, and the Walfords, having congratulated him so warmly that he almost began to think they were nice people again, the departure was made on Thursday morning as arranged.

They travelled, of course, by the Newhaven route, and reached the Gare St. Lazare after dark on a rainy evening. The amount of luggage they possessed among them made Kent stare, as he watched half a dozen porters hoisting trunks, and a perambulator, and a bassinet on to the bus, and it seemed as if they would never get out of the station. At last they rattled away, however, through the wet streets, the baby whimpering, and the nurse flustered, and he and Cynthia very tired. They drove to a little hotel near the Madeleine, where they intended to stay until they found a suitable pension, and where dinner and the warmth of 'grave' were very grateful. Nurse also picked up after the waiter's appearance with her tray and a half-bottle of 'vin compris,' and, as their fatigue passed, exhilaration was in the ascendant once more. Cynthia recovered so much that, finding the rain had ceased and the moon was shining, she wanted to go out and look at the boulevards. So Humphrey and she took a stroll for an hour, and said how strange it was to think they should have come to live in Paris, and how funnily things happened; and they had a curaçoa each at a café, and

went back to their fusty red room on the third-floor, with the inevitable gilt clock and the festooned bedstead, quite gaily.

The chambermaid brought in their chocolate at eight o'clock next morning, and her brisk 'Bon jour, m'sieur et madame!' sounded much more cheerful to them both than Ann's knock at the door, with 'The 'ot water, mum!' to which they were accustomed. The sun streamed in brilliantly as she parted the window-curtains, and, after the chocolate and rolls were finished, Kent proceeded to dress, and, leaving Cynthia in bed, betook himself to the office of the paper in the Rue du Quatre Septembre.

Beaufort had not come yet, and, pending his chief's arrival, he occupied himself by examining a copy. The tone of the notes struck him as decidedly poor, and a lengthy 'interview' with one of the prominent French actresses abounded in all the well-worn clichés of the amateur. The 'luxurious' apartment into which the interviewer was ushered, the lady's 'mock' despair, which gave place to 'graceful' resignation and 'fragrant' cigarettes, made him sick. Beaufort was very cordial

when he entered, though, and it was reassuring to the new sub to see how light he made of everything. The work was as easy as A, B, C. 'Turf Topics' was contributed by a fellow called Jordan, and, really, Mr. Kent would find a few hours daily more than enough to prepare an issue. They went into his private room, where a bottle of vermouth and a pile of French and English journals, marked and mutilated, were the most conspicuous features of the writing-table; and Kent came to the conclusion that his editor was an extremely pleasant man, as the vermouth was sipped and they chatted over two excellent cigars.

At first the duties did not prove quite so simple as they had promised to one who had never had anything to do with producing a paper before, and the printer worried him a good deal. But Beaufort was highly satisfied. The novice was swift to grasp details, and took such an infinity of pains in seasoning and amplifying the réchauffés, that really his stuff read almost like original matter. As he began to feel his feet, too, he put forth ideas, and, finding that the other was quite ready to listen to them, gained con-

fidence, and was not without a mistaken belief that in so quickly mastering the mysteries of a weekly and painfully exiguous little print, of which four-fifths were eclectic, he had displayed ability of a brilliant order.

Primarily the labour he devoted to the task was ludicrously disproportionate to the result, but by degrees he got through it with more rapidity. When a month had passed since the morning he sat down in the sub-editorial chair of *The World and his Wife*, he discovered that he was doing in an afternoon what it had formerly taken him two days to accomplish, and marvelled how he could have been so stupid. The work had devolved upon him almost entirely by now, for Beaufort, having shown him the way in which he should go, dropped in late, and withdrew early, and did little but drink vermouth, and say, 'Yes, certainly, capital!' while he was there. Kent proposed the subject for the week's 'interview,' wrote — or re-wrote — the causerie, and secured the majority of the few advertisements that they obtained. Also, when the subject of the semi-biographical sketch was not a good-looking woman, it

was he who interviewed her. When the lady was attractive, 'Billy' Beaufort attended to that department himself.

Cynthia had found a pension in the Madeleine quarter, which had been highly recommended for a permanency, and here they had removed. They had two fairly large bedrooms, communicating au quatrième, and paid a hundred and fifty francs a week. It did not leave much surplus out of the salary for incidental expenses, after reckoning the nurse's wages; but it was supposed to be very cheap, and Madame Garin and her vivacious daughter, who skipped a good deal for thirty years of age, and was voluble in bad English, begged them on no account to let any of the other boarders know they were received at such terms, for that would certainly be the commencement of Madame Garin and her daughter's ruin. The establishment was well patronized, and the meals, with which about twenty-five French people down the long table appeared contented, would have been pronounced execrable in a third-rate boarding-house in Bloomsbury. The twenty-five people were waited on by a leisurely and abstracted Italian, and the

intervals between the meagre courses were of such duration that Kent swore he had generally forgotten what the soup had been called by the time the cold entrée reached him.

Yet they were not uncomfortable. Their room was cosy in the lamplight when the winter set in, and Étienne had made a fire, and the curtains of the windows were drawn to hide the view of snowy roofs; and though the dinner often left them hungry, they could go out before retiring, and have chocolate and cakes. As a pressman, too, Kent got tickets for the theatres and the concerts. It was livelier than Leamington Road, to say the least of it—more lively for him than for Cynthia, perhaps; but an improvement for her as well, since one or two of the women were companionable, and did to take walks with, while he was at the office, or to polish her French on in the chilly salon.

One afternoon when he was sitting at his desk, and Beaufort had gone, the clerk came in to him with a card that bore the name of Mrs. Deane-Pitt. She was staying in Paris, and the editor had accepted his sugges-

tion that it might be a good idea to interview a novelist for a change. Kent had sent the proofs to her the day before, but he had never seen her. He told the clerk to show her in with some satisfaction, and wished he had put his other jacket on; for the authoress of 'Two and a Passion' was a woman to meet.

He felt shabbier still when she entered; she looked to him like an animated fashion-plate reduced to human height. From the hues of her hat to the swirl of her skirt, it was evident that Mrs. Deane-Pitt made money, and knew where to spend it. An osprey in the hat was the only touch of vulgarity. Everybody would not have termed her pretty; but her eyes and teeth were good, and both flashed when she talked. Her age might have been anything from thirty to thirty-five.

'I wanted to see Mr. Beaufort,' she said, in a clear, crisp voice; 'but I hear he's out.'

'Yes; he is out,' said Kent. 'Is it anything *I* can do?'

'Well, I don't like the "interview." I dare say it was my own fault; but I object to suffering for my own faults—one has to suffer for so many other people's

in this world. It's all about "Two and a Passion." I wrote "Two and a Passion" seven years ago—and I didn't get a royalty on it, either! Why not quote the books I've done since, and say more about the one that's just out? You say, "Mrs. Deane-Pitt confessed to having recently published another novel," and then you drop it as if it were a failure or a hot coal. And "confessed"—why "confessed"? That's the tone I don't like in the thing. You write about me as if I belonged to another profession, and dabbled in Literature.'

He felt that 'Billy' Beaufort would not be sorry to have missed her.

'May I see the proofs again?' he asked.

She gave them to him, and settled herself in her chair. He looked at them pen in hand, and she looked at him.

'It can easily be put right, can't it, Mr.——'

'"Mr. Kent." Easily—oh yes! Will you tell me something about your new book? I'm ashamed to say I haven't read it yet.'

'Don't apologize. It's called "Thy Neighbour's Husband."'

'Does she bolt with him, or do you end it virtuously?'

'Virtuously, monsieur,' she said, smiling. 'You travel fast!'

'And—please go on! Are there cakes and ale, or does she tend the sick and visit the poor?'

'You appal me,' said Mrs. Deane-Pitt. 'Whatever my faults, I am fin-de-siècle. Forgive me for saying "fin-de-siècle"—a modern version's needed badly; I end with a question-point.'

'Not questioning the lady's——'

'Oh, her *happiness*, of course!'

'"This brilliant and analytical study, which is already giving rise to considerable discussion," would be the kind of strain, then, would it not?'

'Entirely,' she said. 'I'm awfully sorry to give you so much trouble.'

'The "trouble's" a pleasure. You don't want your "favourite dog" mentioned, do you? Favourite dogs are becoming banal. Er——'

'Three,' she said. 'Yes; a boy and two girls.'

'Does the boy—"in a picturesque suit"—come

into the room, and lead up to "evident maternal pride"?'

'He's a dear little fellow!' she answered. 'But do you think "evident maternal pride" would be quite in keeping? No; I'd stick to me and the work. Besides, domesticity is tedious to read about; the dullest topic in the world is other people's children.'

Kent laughed.

'I'll explain to Mr. Beaufort,' he declared; 'you shall have a revise sent on to-morrow. I'm sure you'll find it all right when he understands the style of thing you want.'

'Thank you,' she said dryly. 'I assure you I have no misgivings, Mr. Kent. "Kent"! I've never had any correspondence with you, have I? The name's familiar to me, somehow.'

'An alias is "The Garden of England,"' he said.

'No, you haven't written anything, have you?'

'Two novels. One is published, and the post is wearing out the other.'

'I remember,' she cried, uttering the title triumphantly; 'I read it. What grand reviews you had!

Of course, I know now. I liked your book extremely, Mr. Kent. Humphrey Kent, isn't it?'

'Thank you,' he said. 'Yes, Humphrey Kent.'

'And you go in for journalism, too, eh?'

'Oh, this is a new departure. I was never in a paper office until lately.'

'Really!' she exclaimed. 'You aren't giving fiction up?'

'I'm pot-boiling, Mrs. Deane-Pitt. Do you think it very inartistic of me?'

'Don't!' she said. 'Inartistic! I hate that cant. There are papers that are always calling *me* inartistic. One's got to live. Oh, I admire the people who can starve in West Kensington, and take three years to write a novel, but their altitude is beyond me. I write to sell, moi—though you needn't put that in the "interview." But I shouldn't have thought you'd have any trouble in placing your books—you oughtn't to to-day. I expect you've been too "literary"; you'll grow out of it.'

'You don't believe in——'

'I'm a practical woman. The public read to be

amused, and the publishers want what the public will read, good, bad, or indifferent; that's my view. You mustn't make me say these things, though,' she broke off, laughing, and getting up; 'it's most indiscreet—to a pressman. . . . I shall send you a copy of "Thy Neighbour's Husband"—to a colleague. Good-afternoon, Mr. Kent. I'll leave you to go on with your work now. Pray don't look so relieved.'

'I should value the copy extremely,' he said. 'It was anything but relief—I was struggling to conceal despair.'

She put out her hand, and a faint perfume clung to his own after the door had closed. Though her standpoint was not his own, her personality had impressed him, and, as he watched her from the window re-entering her cab, Kent was sorry she had not remained longer.

He trusted she would not forget her promise to send him her novel, and when it reached him, a few days later, he opened it with considerable eagerness. The perusal disappointed him somewhat, and the story seemed to him unworthy of the pen that had written

'Two and a Passion.' But he replied, as he was bound to do, with a letter of grateful appreciation, and endeavoured, moreover, to persuade himself that he liked it better than he did. The lady, on her side, wrote a cordial little note, thanking him for the amended proof-sheets—'I had no idea I was so clever or so charming.' She said she should be pleased to see him if he could ever spare the time to look in; she could give him a cup of 'real English tea,' and she was very truly his—Eva Deane-Pitt.

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